

SATURN

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION

ACE 35¢ MAR

*Eternal
Adam*
by

**JULES
VERNE**

**A
NEW
FIND**



NOEL LOOMIS. ROBERT SILVERBERG. ALAN BARCLAY

SATURN THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION MAR.

THE HERITAGE OF JULES VERNE

We think it appropriate that we initiate the first issue of SATURN, new and latest science-fiction magazine, by presenting for the first time the final work of science-fiction to be written by the founder of this specifically 20th Century literature, Jules Verne. To the best of our knowledge this outstanding novel has never been previously translated. Yet those who are familiar with Verne (who is enjoying renewed popularity through the medium of *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*) will recognize that *Eternal Adam* truly is the climax of Verne's creative life.

Eternal Adam is a novel that seems to have been designed for the modern science-fiction reader, for alone of all Verne's works, it reaches into the farthest future and dares to envision the kind of world-shaking changes that only we of the Atomic Age have learned to appreciate and savor.

This, we think, fittingly dedicates our new venture. Like Saturn, the ringed planet whose unique image stirs the human imagination over that of any other celestial object, SATURN seeks the unique in science-fiction, the stories which encompass the greatest thrills which have built upon the Verne heritage a whole new literary cosmos of science-fantasy.

We sincerely hope you enjoy SATURN. Your letters and comments will be welcomed.

THE EDITORS

**Secrets
entrusted
to a
few**



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know*. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the *hidden processes of man's mind*, and the *mastery of life's problems*. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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SATURN SUGGESTS . . .

A Review of Science-Fiction Fare

A. E. Van Vogt has done it again. His *THE PAWNS OF NULL-A*, (35c), recently released by Ace Books, is another masterpiece of originality. Mr. Van Vogt is rightfully regarded as one of the great masters of modern science-fiction and we feel that *THE PAWNS OF NULL-A* is another example of his ability to create imaginative classics.

THE PAWNS OF NULL-A is a tale of interplanetary warfare. A holocaust that threatens to destroy whole solar systems and wreck a universe. The pace is fast and the brilliancy of narration makes this a book that will appeal to the most critical science-fiction reader.

Mr. Van Vogt was born in Canada and is now living in Los Angeles. He is active in the exploration of such fields of mental science as dianetics, hypnotism, general semantics, etc. All of which will lead to even more exciting writing for us to look forward to.

SATURN

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE-FICTION

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CONTENTS

Thrilling Full-Length Novel

- ETERNAL ADAM by Jules Verne 76

Never before translated, this original publication of Verne's last and greatest vision of the far future is a first-magnitude science-fiction scoop!

Astounding Galactic Novelette

- THE CHAOS SALIENT by Noel Loomis 4

Whoever finds the Terebellum Stone will have the key to the bridge across Chaos.

Outstanding Short Stories

- FATHER IMAGE by Robert Silverberg 28

In a cosmic colony, paternalism can be a dirty word.

- A JACKO FOR MCCOY by Alan Barclay 44

The invaders from space were an unknown quantity to the Nth degree.

- THE BRIDEY MURPHY WAY by Paul Brandts 60

Somewhere on that world was the House of the Second Life.

- VISITORS' BOOK by John Brunner 113

For the Solar System, the best defense was—the Open Door!

Editor and Publisher ROBERT C. SPROUL

Art Director JOHN GIUNTA

Editorial Consultant DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

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THE CHAOS SALIENT

AN ASTOUNDING GALACTIC NOVELETTE

The fate of the entire galaxy depended on the success of Rockman's expedition to the neighboring universe. And the fate of that daring journey, climax of a hundred centuries of space-flight, depended on finding the fabulous Terebellum Stone. But what the frantic searchers never suspected was that the stone itself might be equally anxious to find them!

by NOEL LOOMIS

CAPTAIN FRANK ROCKMAN of the 690th Terrestrial Combat Engineers, the crack Earth outfit in the Metagalactic Service, waited for the elevator at the eighty-first floor. He saw the warning light and stepped absently into the bobbin. He heard a swift sucking of air. The bobbin revolved, and without causing any hesitation in the upward motion of the express elevator, spun him into the middle floor of the three-level car. It left him in a corner. He swayed for an in-



stant, then gained his balance and stepped quickly out of the receiving-area.

Then he stiffened. His long right arm whipped up in a formal salute to Major Fisher, the regimental adjutant, whose black eyes were always a trifle extruding, and who gave him a limp-fish return.

In the big Administration Dome, it was not required that junior officers salute other officers below space admiral, but Major Fisher was a man who placed a high value on his own small rank. Also, they were on one of the planets of Terebellum in the Constellation Sagittarius—a long way from Earth—and Rockman didn't trust that over-brightness in the major's eyes, so he was willing to humor him.

The captain himself, with some eight thousand generations of Space Service history in his family, didn't worry about such a nominal item of respect as a salute. Anyway, at that particular time his mind was otherwise occupied; in twenty-four hours he would leave Terebellum for the edge of the Void to establish one of the first metagalactic outposts in the Fourth Universe.

The next day at this time he would be setting out with his

company for El Phekran, somewhere in the Big Bear, and as yet he had uncovered no information that would enable them to avoid or even detect the Maelstrom, that curious dimensional warp that was believed to exercise its most destructive force in the general area of the Void.

The fabulous Terebellum Stone, said to contain explicit directions for navigation in the Void (though in what form the directions were recorded, no living entity seemed to know), had been hunted intensively by Metagalactic Intelligence for several hundred years, but four years ago MI had given up and turned the search over to Rockman. He was the man whose ship and company stood to be the first in a long time to venture into the zone where they would be exposed to the tremendous sucking energy of the Maelstrom.

The Terebellum Stone was supposed to be on this planet, Terebellum IX, but now, after four years, Rockman was not even sure that there was such a stone, and it was getting him down. So he saluted Major Fisher like an automaton.

HE HAD hardly moved out of the receiving-area in

the cage, when the bobbin on the ninety-eighth floor spun. There was no pause in the bullet-like ascension of the elevator, but a man was deposited in the corner, and for a moment Captain Rockman, looking at him with puzzled interest, forgot his own troubles.

He was a hard-looking man. His face and arms were bronze from space-burn. His big nose was red and had that peculiar pock-marking that meant the man had gone through an ion cloud without a shield—in other words, he had been a stow-away on an intergalactic liner. His sleeves were rolled up and tucked under so no cuffs were visible—if indeed there were cuffs at the ends of them. His left hand was folded and its back was planted on his hip, and through the triangle thus formed he carried a worn overcoat.

It was odd that he had an overcoat on Terebellum IX, which, as military headquarters for the entire Second Metagalaxy, was pretty well regulated and had no cold weather even at the poles. Rockman stood a little more stiffly. It was odd that a civilian should be on this planet at all.

Major Fisher, the captain no-

ticed, moved slightly to one side. It was true the man did not look savory, but Rockman, noting him somewhat absently, was more immediately interested in Fisher's reaction, for it was common opinion around Earth headquarters that the major was small and mean, and it was general knowledge that he was addicted to doing unnecessarily unpleasant things.

The man himself, who had been solemnly watching the green floor-lights flash by, turned around. He looked with great, deep, soft eyes at Captain Rockman and asked with quiet dignity, "What time is it?"

Major Fisher snorted loudly, as if to imply that such a man could have no concern with time anyway, but the man did not show that he heard it. His deep eyes were fixed on Rockman.

Rockman glanced at his watch. "Forty-one-thirteen," he said.

"What is that by Earth time?" the man asked.

"About ten o'clock," said Rockman.

The man turned back to the floor-lights, his overcoat swinging as he moved. Then he looked at Rockman again. "In the morning?" he asked.

"Yes, morning," said Rockman, puzzled. He was beginning to be concerned. Was the man ill?

Major Fisher stepped forward. The car was starting to slow down for the two hundredth floor. "Look here," said Fisher sharply. "What are you doing in this building anyway? This is a military headquarters. I suggest you stay on the elevator and go back down."

The strange man turned and looked at Fisher. His next words were unexpectedly humble. "I won't get in anybody's way."

Fisher's mouth quirked. "Don't argue. Do what I said."

The car was coming to a stop. The man looked uncertain, and Rockman realized that for some reason the man definitely wanted to get out on the two hundredth floor.

Rockman suggested, "He isn't actually violating a regulation."

Fisher's eyebrows shot up. "I ordered him down," he said.

Rockman frowned. Why did they pick up a first-generation Space Service officer and send him so far from home before he was tried? Here on Terebellum IX there were many different entities. Diplomacy, tact, good sense and forbearance were

prerequisite.

The major stepped sharply to the man's side. He reached for the man's arm. The man looked at him sadly almost apologetically, Rockman thought, as a foot-long spark of livid green fire jumped from his space-burned elbow to the major's outstretched hand.

The major grunted as it hit him. He staggered back a step, holding his hand.

The elevator had stopped. "You'd better get to a doctor, Major. That hand is burned," said Rockman.

Major Fisher looked wild. "I'll have him arrested!" he said. His face was white with pain.

"He hasn't done anything for which you can arrest him," said Rockman.

Fisher glared at him, and was about to speak when the elevator door swung open. Fisher spun around, but the stranger was already gone.

FISHER ran out into the immense stainless steel hall, and Rockman followed him. But the two officers were the only persons on the floor. Nowhere was there a space-burned stranger with an overcoat under his arm.

Rockman paused to clear

the elevator. Then he looked around at Fisher. "He might be a hard man to arrest," he said.

Fisher turned and stared at him. "Why do you say that, Captain?" he demanded.

"Just speculation," Rockman said hastily. "The stranger seemed to have some powers that might stand investigation before one..." He paused, for the major's face was flushed.

"After wasting the resources of the 173rd Division for four years," the major said acidulously, "without uncovering a trace of the Terebellum Stone, you would show better taste by forgetting there is such a thing as in investigation."

The captain winced. The major, for all his pettishness, had touched him in a tender spot—the more so because his failure to find the stone probably would cost his life and the lives of all the men in his company. The captain looked at the major's beady eyes and reminded himself that a last-minute fuss, even with a man like Fisher, would not help. A man getting ready to lead a hundred and fifty good men to sure death had no time for quarreling.

Rockman swung hard on his heel. He caught the autowalk,

made a cross-connection, took an escalator, paused before the HWAA detector which would sound an alarm in the inner office in his height, weight, and accouterment coordinates should show any significant variation from his recorded index.

The door raised and Rockman stepped into the outer office of division headquarters. He passed rows of humming teletenographs. Some wag had chalked "Agnes" on the last machine before the division commander's office. Rockman smiled in spite of his troubles. It was a good thing the general had a sense of humor as well as a little of the wolf strain.

Rockman took the inter-office cross-walk to his own department. He sat down heavily at his desk, one of a dozen in the same room, and immediately the voco-recorder announced: "The colonel wishes to see you, sir."

Rockman dropped his service cap into the bottom drawer of his desk. He looked around. His desk was at the rear of the room, and all the officers seemed busy.

Rockman felt behind the false partition in the drawer. He was pleased when his fingers touched the waxed paper.

His favorite* bootlegger had been around, and Rockman well knew that the other officers in the room were ignoring him because they themselves all had ham sandwiches tucked away.

Rockman was careful, for possession of non-regulation food was a serious offense. He could lose his rank and his command if he should be detected. He unwrapped a corner of the sandwich below the top of the desk, ducked behind a tier of plastic baskets on his desk-top, and took a quick bite. It was succulent. The captain, chewing slowly and cautiously, put the rest of the sandwich back in the false compartment and opened another drawer. There his prescription for the day, two dozen food tablets scientifically compounded according to his body needs, were in a plastic bottle. He ignored the directions on the bottle. He shook all the tablets out in his left hand, threw back his head, and poured them in his mouth.

They went down. He grimaced. He hated the things; the Rockmans always had been heavy eaters, and sometimes he thought he'd starve on pills. He reached again for the bottom drawer. Then he remembered he had to see the colon-

el, and the colonel could smell a forbidden ham sandwich on a man's breath as far as he could see him. Rockman desisted. That first bite, of course, would be covered by the food-pills. He got up, carefully picked a crumb of precious white bread from his gold uniform and put it in his mouth.

THE COLONEL was an elderly man with a weathered face, a fringe of gray hair and sharp gray eyes to match. He wore his platinum comet, the symbol of metagalactic rank, with ease, for he had been on a dozen intergalactic sorties and had seen combat action in the Andromedan Campaign. Quite different, Rockman noted, from his adjutant, Major Fisher, now sitting at a desk within easy hearing, who had never been outside of an office.

"I assume you're ready to travel tomorrow," said Colonel Holt.

"Yes, sir."

The colonel gave him a sheaf of papers. "Here are your orders, clearance, password, code, Gabrielson frequency—everything the service can provide to make your stay pleasant on El Phekras...if you get there. I

suppose there is nothing new on the stone."

"Nothing of consequence, sir," Rockman said. Suddenly he felt very tired. With his orders in his hand, the hour was tangibly close, and the threat of being drawn uncountable parsecs into the vortex of an unknown dimension, became real and ominous.

"How are the men taking it? I suppose they know."

"They're taking it all right," said Rockman tightly. "They're good men. They know but they're all right."

"You have one more day on Terebellum," said the Colonel. "It is my duty to remind you that any officer arrested for an offense subject to court-martial within one hundred chronos of departure on an extragalactic assignment, will be relieved of his post or his command and grounded until cleared." The colonel finished the recital and said in a quieter voice: "I don't have to remind you such detention is considered a mark of cowardice in the Service, so if you had any celebrating to do—"

"I know what you mean, sir," said Rockman, "but don't worry. I won't do anything to reflect on the Six Hundred and Ninetieth. I was out all night

last night—but not celebrating." He paused. "I thought for a while last night I had the stone."

The colonel's keen old eyes widened, then he lifted a sheet of zinc paper. "There's a memo here from the 'boys upstairs' about the stone." He looked up at Rockman's wide eyes. "That's right. Metagalactic headquarters. The biggest and shiniest brass in the whole Fourth Universe. And this is from the space-general himself. It's strange, captain. I've been in the service sixty years, and this is the closest I've ever been to the big HQ. I don't even know what sort of entity the general is, but I guess those turkey tracks are his signature."

"Why is he interested in my outfit?" asked Rockman. "We're only one of a million outposts to be laid along the Void."

"Sit down, Captain," said Holt. "You've spent four years hunting the Terebellum Stone. Intelligence has your file, of course, with all reports, but now MGHQ wants a summary of your story before you go. I'm afraid it's obvious that the entire Second Metagalaxy is highly vulnerable on the western quadrant as long as we can-

not operate through the Void, and I guess they want all the information they can possibly get. Apparently they expect to go on looking for the Stone. You can dictate a statement now, if you wish."

"All right," said Rockman. He sat down and closed his eyes for a moment to organize his thoughts.

Then the colonel said, "We'll need a witness." He raised his voice. "Major Fisher."

Rockman drew a deep breath as the glassy-eyed major came over, but otherwise he remained calm, inside and out. No doubt the major would be pleased to hear Rockman's confession of failure.

THE TELESTENO began to hum. Rockman dictated:

"This is the 201st day of the Earth-year 324,972. Four years ago I, Frank Rockman, Captain, Earth Contingent, Combat Engineers, was assigned to investigate the Terebellum Stone. I first determined its history, which broadly is as follows:

"In the last intergalactic war, about the year 288,350, the Second Metagalaxy was attacked by the Hundred and Seventh, also known as N.G.C. 6822. The Second was forced

to fight defensively, for all their ships that approached the Void were sucked into the Maelstrom and ceased to exist in any known dimension. After one fleet of the Second was destroyed, the Hundred and Seventh sent huge expeditionary forces through the Void and penetrated the Second, defeating all opposing forces.

"Eventually the Hundred and Seventh closed on Terebellum IX, which was then, as now, MGHQ. In the meantime Major William Rockman, an officer in Intelligence, with a native terebellumite as junior officer, had been detailed to ascertain the directional dimensional formula used by the enemy in avoiding the Maelstrom. His mission had been successful, but he returned to Terebellum IX on the day the Hundred and Seventh attacked MGHQ. In the face of metagalactic defeat, Major Rockman was ordered to preserve the secret in any way he might be able to do so. Some hours later, before the attack broke, he sent word to the outer galaxy by Gabrielson frequency that his last mission had been achieved. Subsequently, in a great nuclear bombing by the countless fleets of the enemy, it is believed now, all living or-

ganism then on the ninth planet of Terebellum were destroyed.

"For the last six hundred years, Intelligence has conducted research to locate the information, since, due to the difficulty of experiment, Communications has not been able to make the Void passable. Four years ago, Intelligence turned its available information over to the Earth contingent, which was scheduled to make the first landing in the Void to establish an outpost. That information was turned over to me.

"After four years of investigation, last night I found a subterranean cave, very heavily shielded and obviously containing something of great importance, several kilometers under the surface of this planet. We burned an entrance into it and discovered that it held a single tablet of blue marble, about six feet long, two feet wide, and a foot thick. There was no other item of any description in the chamber, and there was no apparent writing on the stone.

"The stone appeared to have quarry marks on it, but the chamber itself had been hermetically sealed and filled with helium and there was no clue to its age. Examination of the

shielding materials was not conclusive."

Rockman took a deep breath. "In the presence of an unofficial observer from Alphirk, we floated the rock out on a nullifier and trailed it to the surface. While my orderly and I were closing the door, the stone disappeared in an interval of a few millichrons.

"I have as yet no explanation. The Snake observer said his back had been turned." Rockman sighed wearily. "We have found no trace of the stone since that time, and we have no further information on the Maelstrom. This ends my report."

A ZINC sheet rolled from the telesteno. Rockman reached over resignedly to sign it. "It isn't much," he admitted.

"It must have been a blow," said the colonel sympathetically, "to find it the night before you were to go and then to lose it out of your own hands."

"It was," Rockman said heavily, and added, "I've already given Intelligence a full report."

Colonel Holt was thoughtful. "It's odd the Terebellumites didn't leave any kind of information."

"That was before the days of the Metagalactic Museum and the Stellar Archives," said Rockman. "And you must remember that Terebellum IX itself was pulverized in the bombing to a depth of several kilometers—probably just what the Hundred and Seventh is planning to do again. The only thing that saved the Second Metagalaxy in that scrap was the fact that the combined enemy fleets ran into a fifty-parsec cloud of ionized iron as they were making a flank attack down through Hydra, and their magnetic instruments were wrecked." He talked like a man whose thoughts were heavy.

Major Fisher leaned over and signed the sheet as a witness, then got up and indolently tossed the pen on the desk. "Has there ever been any evidence that Major Rockman actually secured that so-called secret?" he asked.

"His message was received over the Gabrielsons," Rockman said, nettled.

"Hmp," said Fisher.

Rockman was on his feet. His chest swelled as he faced the major. "I don't like that remark, Sir. Major Rockman of the Intelligence was one of

my forefathers, and I may say that I have complete faith in him."

"It's a shame," Major Fisher said coolly, "that Intelligence was one of my forefathers, and I may say that I have complete faith in him."

"It's a shame," Major Fisher said coolly, "that Intelligence today does not share your confidence."

Captain Rockman's fists were closing. "Be explicit," he barked.

Fisher's bulgy eyes were suggestive of insolent gloating. "I have heard that it is believed privately in Tarazed that perhaps the late Major Rockman did not actually secure the formula at all."

Rockman turned to Colonel Holt. "Have I your permission to flatten this moron's nose, sir?"

The colonel's lips were tight. Fisher was going on defiantly, "They are also saying that Captain Rockman, his descendant, never discovered the Terebellum Stone—that he reported it only to protect his family name."

Rockman swung at him, but the colonel, with a steel-band hold on the inside of his elbow, stopped the blow.

"Captain, there must be no

fighting," he snapped. "Remember that you are on good behavior this last day."

Rockman caught himself. He drew to his full height, clicked his heels, and saluted smartly. "Thank you, sir." The major went back to his own desk.

The communicator was buzzing softly. The colonel put his fingertips on the plate and listened. He switched on his perceptix unit, which meant that a message was coming in from an alien dome. Captain Rockman stood, waiting for dismissal.

The colonel listened, then his gray eyes widened. He turned to Rockman. "They're clearing the line to MGHQ." Even an old hand like the colonel could not keep the excitement out of his voice. Rockman himself was silent, awed.

The colonel said once, "Yes, sir," and lifted his fingertips from the receiving-plate. He looked at Rockman. "Captain," he said, "intelligence has requested that you present yourself 'upstairs' for an interview at nine hundred and fifty decichrons this evening."

"That's impossible," said Rockman quickly, to cover his confusion. "That's half-way

across the continent, and my company has to be on board the *Dimensioneer*, with all equipment, by noon tomorrow."

"You have a first sergeant, haven't you?" the colonel said sharply.

Rockman stuttered. "Yes, of course. Yoder's a good man, but—"

"Give him a chance to do his job. You catch the next rocket for Headquarters Field. You needn't break your neck. There's ample time. And by the way, Captain..." Holt paused. "You'll be in command of the post on El Phekra—if you get there—along with a contingent of Hornets and another of Roses."

Rockman stopped with his mouth open. "What are you talking about?"

"Regulations. This is the first united metagalactic defense effort in history, and every outpost has to have three different entities. Supposed to be a test of ability to cooperate or something, I guess. You can bet that rule wasn't made by military men."

Major Fisher was pretending to be busy at his desk.

Holt glanced at his chronograph. "There's still some

time," he said, "and I'm interested in that story about the stone."

ROCKMAN was quiet for a moment, thinking. Then he said slowly, "Things broke wrong, but you can't tell that in a report. I always had an official observer, until yesterday. It was one of those Armadillos from Rutilicus yesterday morning, and I guess he ate too many flies for breakfast." Rockman chuckled wryly. "Anyway, he went home with a stomach-ache, and I didn't figure this lead was any different from a hundred others, so we went on down. We found the stone and we brought it out. There was only myself and Lieutenant Carey, and this Alphirkian Snake."

The colonel's eyes looked sharp. "Haven't the Snakes opposed your hunting the stone all along?"

"Yes, they have. They seemed to throw lots of obstacles in the way, but there never has been anything I could put my finger on. I never could tell whether it was clumsiness or design."

The colonel's eyebrows raised. "No Snake was ever clumsy," he said. "If they got in your way, it was because

they wanted to. The confounded telepathic reptiles shouldn't have been invited into the federation. They don't believe in playing it square." Almost imperceptibly, the colonel glanced over at Fisher, but then he caught himself and looked back at his desk. "I hear now they've located new sources of radio-actives. Some pretty potent ones, too—up around element number two hundred, the boys claim. That's pretty violent stuff, and the Snakes haven't reported it. They won't, either."

"Why doesn't the federation—"

The colonel snorted. "Son, it was hard enough to organize the nations of the Earth—and here we deal with whole galaxies. There are over a trillion worlds in the Second Metagalaxy, and of necessity the political organization of such a vast area is so tenuous as to be almost non-existent. What it amounts to is that those who want to participate do, and those who don't want to, do as they please. Sure, there's power here, lots of it, but it's designed more for defense against the outside. As long as the Metagalaxy is at peace, nobody is going to put the heat on the

Snakes if they can avoid it."

"The Snakes don't really belong in the Second anyway, do they?"

"No. They're from the Forty-third Galaxy, in the Twentieth Metagalaxy of Rigel. The Second puts up with them because some day we hope to have some sort of organization for the entire Fourth Universe. You see where that leaves us. If we make the Snakes mad, they pull out and take their galaxy with them, and then the invisible double-crossers in the Forty-Seventh will go too, and there will be two metagalaxies gone for good.... But that isn't telling me how the stone got away."

Rockman was deeply thoughtful. Something was working in his brain. A thought was trying to form. "I didn't trust that Snake," he said finally. "He had more than the usual glitter in his eye. I *knew* he was going to try to get away with it." Rockman put his hands on the colonel's desk and said slowly, "But that's the strange thing, Colonel. I don't really believe the Snake *did* do it. He wanted to, all right, but somebody or something else beat him to it."

The colonel said, "And no-

body else was there, either before or after?"

Rockman looked up. "Yes, now that you mention it. After the thing disappeared, there was a man walking away with an overcoat under his arm. But *he* couldn't have concealed it." Rockman went on, frowning now as he tried to figure out something. "A man with a space-burned face and—great gallium, colonel!" He sat up rigid and stared at Holt. "That was the man on the elevator!" he said hoarsely....

THE COLONEL sent out an alarm for the man who had been on the elevator. Major Fisher assisted eagerly, but the man was not found. He had been seen, but not after the elevator episode.

In the meantime, Captain Rockman went glumly to his company barracks and conferred with First Sergeant Yoder. He found there was little left for him to do but sign the ration report, the payroll and the travel sheet for the *Dimensionseer*. Then he took a pneumatic tube to the jet-field.

It was at once obvious that the "boys upstairs" had ways of circumventing the ponderous masses of red tape that usual-

ly"surrounded metagalactic affairs. Rockman had only to identify himself. His seat was reserved. He boarded the ship, and a few hours later was riding an autowalk into a small, old-fashioned, egg-shaped steel building that housed the Space Service's holy of holies—Metagalactic Headquarters.

The arrangement differed from that of the Earth contingent headquarters mainly in the fact that everything seemed to be on a colossal scale, to allow, Rockman thought, for any conceivable sized entity. Also there were many doors, and Rockman was aware that they all were thoroughly blanketed with black light detectors and scanning rays.

He passed through half a dozen secretaries: a Jellyfish from Procyon, apparently at home in a glass jar filled with water, but well able to talk to him through vocoform and perceptix units; a giant Hornet from Beta Pegasi, with its head enclosed in a small dome filled with the greenish-yellow chlorine gas that it breathed on its native planet.

The secretaries were efficient, and he was not delayed. Within a couple of chronos he was entering a wide door

marked over the top, in the mathematical symbols that were the official written language of the metagalaxy, *Intelligence*.

He went through the door and saw on the desk before him the diamond-encrusted insignie of the banded heavens that signified the Milky Way government. Below it, the three rayed stars that indicated the rank of general-commander were enough to make Captain Rockman gulp unashamedly, for in field duty a general-commander was in charge of an entire galaxy.

Rockman raised his eyes to the entity who was head of Metagalactic Intelligence—and started. Across the desk reared the great triangular head of an Alphirkian Snake. Its beady eyes glittered lidlessly, and its glossy black skin shone under the light. Its mouth opened and a forked red tongue flicked out and back in. Rockman, aware that its huge body was coiled behind the desk, stood, for an instant, paralyzed.

The Snake's mouth opened, and words began to come from a vocoform on the desk?

"Sit down, Captain, and be at ease. Your time, of course, is limited, so I will ask you the question Intelligence is most in-

terested in: What do you think happened to the Terebellum Stone?"

Rockman hesitated. He was hardly prepared for such a blunt question—but why should it not be asked that way? Then he felt an unusual pull at his mind, and from his experience with the Alphirkian observer, he knew the Snake was trying to read his mind. The captain was not trained in telepathic usages, but he knew he could hinder the Snake's reading. He blocked off his thoughts of the stone as well as he could and began to wonder why Intelligence was controlled by a Snake when MGHQ didn't trust the Snakes anyway.

He felt the Snake's displeasure at his refusal to cooperate, but it was vague and like a dream. Then he felt himself going under the Snake's hypnotic influence. He knew the Snake was trying to find out something that he himself did not know. The Snake thought Rockman knew something about the Terebellum Stone, and it was trying to get that information.

He felt himself being pulled toward the Snake, then he fought off the drug-like power, looked the Snake between the eyes and said coldly, "You

won't find out anything from me."

The Snake's eyes glittered once. Then it moved—almost at light-speed, it seemed. Rockman found himself in the crushing coils of its body. He struggled but the Snake held him almost without effort. The coils tightened and it was hard to breathe. His arms were pinned at his sides and the glossy black head was opposite his face.

The Snake said, "Tell me what you did with the stone and I'll let you go."

ROCKMAN had just enough time to be puzzled. With all the resources of Metagalactic Intelligence, why had the Snake been so primitive? Certainly MI had psychovacs that would extort almost anything that a mind held.

But Rockman didn't have time to be puzzled long. The coils tightened, and it was as if stone walls were closing in. Breathing was harder. He exhaled and found that he could not again expand his chest. His face filled with blood until it felt as if it were at the bursting point. He tried to shout but could not. He looked at the Snake's beady eyes and knew it had no intention of letting

him go until he mentally capitulated.

Things were turning red before his eyes, then black. He tried one last time to get loose, furiously, but now he could hardly move a muscle. He was being murdered in the very headquarters of Metagalactic Intelligence and there was nothing he could do about it.

Then suddenly someone else was there. Rockman sensed the abrupt change in the Snake's muscles, and the black mist cleared enough for him to see a man standing inside of the door. The man's face was space-burned, and he carried an overcoat under his arm.

The man walked toward them without hesitation, and a strange thing happened. The Snake's coils loosened around Rockman; he saw fright in the Snake's eyes, and then the big reptile was gliding back across the room, its horny scales rasping across the stone floor. It was fleeing! Its telepathic perceptions told it the stranger had some power which it feared.

The tramp took a step toward the Snake. He caught it before the door toward which it was gliding. He leveled his forefinger at its head, and a foot-long streak of livid green

fire shot from his finger. It crackled through the air, and there was a sizzling sound as it struck the Snake. An acrid, fetid smoke arose from the Snake's scales at the spot where the lightning entered. The Snake tried to rear but could not. For ten seconds the strange man poured electricity into the reptile; then the Snake wilted. Its head dropped and it collapsed on the floor. Its huge body twitched slowly. The strange man turned to Rockman.

The captain had gotten his breath. He stood at his full height and tried to look confident. "I arrest you in the name of Metagalactic Service," he said boldly to the stranger.

The man looked puzzled. "For—this?" He indicated the Snake.

"No," said Rockman. "For the purpose of questioning you about the Terebellum Stone."

The strange man smiled faintly. "Good," he said. "I've been trying to tell you about that all day."

ROCKMAN had no time to find out what the fellow meant. The door beyond the Snake sank into the floor with a soft snick, and a ring of glowing orange fire, revolving

on itself and turning and wavering and shimmering like a huge, incandescent smoke ring, floated into the room. It inclined once toward the Snake's now inert body, and a soft, humming voice came to them from the vocoform:

"I'm glad you gentlemen did it. You saved us the trouble. I'll have the carcass shipped back to Alphirk—with a suitable explanation." The ring straightened and approached Rockman. "Captain Rockman of the 690th Combat Engineers, I believe. And your guest?"

"This man is my prisoner," Rockman said firmly. "I am taking him back to my own headquarters."

"By all means," said the ring. "Allow me to introduce myself—•General-Commander TrihebdeX, from the third world of Adib, Alpha Draconis, director of Metagalactic Intelligence." For an instant the ring ceased all movement, and poised, straight and level, even with Rockman's head. Rockman drew himself up and saluted sharply.

"At ease, Captain," said the ring. "If you have a few de-cichrons to spare, sit down. You've come a long way. You

needn't hurry back."

"I thought you wanted to talk to me, sir," said Rockman.

"Tsk, tsk," said the ring. It sailed over behind the desk and poised there, apparently relaxed, about half a meter above the desk-top. Bewildered, Rockman sat down in an enormous chair, while the strange man stood patiently at one side with his overcoat under his arm.

"I'M NOT always in the form you see me now," said TrihebdeX. "We natives of Adib have a number of accomplishments peculiarly adapted to intelligence work. Sorry about the falsehood we used to get you here, but it was necessary. You see, Intelligence has long suspected the Snakes, but they're so blasted nimble with their minds we could never pin them down. I've been watching you for some time, Captain, and waiting for your departure. I sent for you at the last moment, and when you arrived I left Colonel Herpetol, there on the floor"—the ring dipped on the side near the Snake—"in charge of the office while I stepped out for a bit of fresh air. You need it around that fellow. Hasn't had a bath for twenty years."

Rockman, watching the ring, saw it revolve backward for an instant as if repulsed. "I figured the colonel would try to pick your mind, which he did—and while he was doing that, he was of necessity off guard and so I stepped in, mentally speaking, and picked *his* mind." Triheb-dex sounded well satisfied. "Sort of a double play, you might say."

After a brief pause, the ring continued. "Anyway, I found out what I wanted to know. The Snakes have in fact located a new source of radioactives, and they want to be sure we don't find the Terebellum Stone, because with that information the Metagalaxy would not be afraid to go on a war footing, and in the latter contingency it would not hesitate to demand full cooperation from Alphirk. I think you see what I mean." The Ring raised slightly. "Sorry to put you to all this trouble, Captain, but it had to be a good act to fool a Snake."

Rockman got up.

"By the way," said the general-commander, "I suppose you gentlemen did a thorough job on our reptilian friend there."

Rockman took a deep

breath. "I don't know if he is dead or not, sir."

"Well, never mind. No use examining him now," Triheb-dex said as Rockman stepped toward the Snake. "Let him lie there a while. Less chance of recovery."

Captain Rockman, still bewildered, managed to ask, "May I have return passage for my prisoner, sir?"

The ring lifted one part of its substance like an eyebrow. "Sure thing. Just get him back to the field. I'll see that everything is taken care of. Good day, Captain."

"Good day, sir." Rockman executed a bewildered but snappy about-face and left the room, followed by the strange man.

WHEN THEY were on the autowalk, Rockman eyed the stranger cautiously. "What's your name?" he asked.

"You can call me Able. That's what your forefather, Major William Rockman, called me."

Rockman stared for an instant. Then he said, "Now hold on a minute. One thing at a time. First, I want to know if you're going to shoot sparks at me."

Able's eyes were big and

round and as soft as a doe's. "No, Captain, I wouldn't harm you. I've been trying to get close enough to talk to you for a long time."

They were approaching the doors. A military car waited for them. Rockman didn't ask more until they were on the jetship. It was a small one and they were the only passengers.

"Now," said Rockman firmly, "you've been wanting to talk to me all day. This is a good time to start."

ABLE CAREFULLY laid his weather-worn overcoat over his knees. "I'm a native of Terebellum," he said. "Probably the only one alive. I am the one who worked with Major Rockman when he was hunting the Maelstrom secret. He took me clear over to the Hundred and Seventh Metagalaxy, and there, because I could to a certain extent change my form, I went into their navigational office and found the directional-dimensional formula that, applied to a certain type of power such as the Schweickhard hyper-drive, would enable our ships to circumvent the Maelstrom. About that time I was captured..."

Able's face became taut for a moment, and when he spoke

again his voice was low. "They have some very ingenious methods of torture, but they made a mistake in trying to find out what I knew before they killed me. Major Rockman made a rather melodramatic rescue and we got away, literally stumbling over smoking enemy carcasses. But when we reached here, the Hundred and Seventh was closing in. The major was ordered to preserve the secret if possible. He put the formula in my care, put me in suspended animation and sealed me in that chamber. Then you came along forty thousand years later and released me."

"That's impossible," Rockman declared. "There wasn't anything in that chamber but a stone."

"Yes, of course," said Able. "I was the stone."

Rockman swallowed and stared at the man. "What's your native—er—form?"

"It varies," Able said succinctly.

"Why didn't you stay around last night when I released you?" asked Rockman.

"I didn't dare. The Snakes—they would have sensed that I had unusual powers and they would have been after me at once. The only thing I could do was change into the most

harmless looking form I knew—your ancestor when he was disguised as a stowaway. Then the Snakes would let me alone until I could reach you in private.”

“But—”

“Yes, I know,” Able said patiently. “But all the torture, and the subsequent treatment for the chamber and all, must have weakened me quite a bit. After that one transformation, I couldn’t seem to change again readily, so rather than take a chance I stayed the way I was. It was quite suitable anyway. The Snakes would never suspect a stowaway. Earth-man of having the formula that would make it possible to navigate the Void.”

Rockman looked at him incredulously. “You mean you still have it? After everything?”

“Sure.” Able was complacent. “In my head. I tried to get to you to tell you, but they threw me out. I didn’t,” he said apologetically, “use the electricity on anyone but Major Fisher. I was afraid he would cause trouble.”

“That’s all right. It’s really a shame you didn’t give him a stiffer jolt. But how did you disappear in the hall yesterday morning?”

“I didn’t, really. A matter of protective coloration. I adopted the pattern of the tile in the floor. These clothes I’m wearing, you see, aren’t really clothes. They’re part of me. And I can do a number of things, especially when I’m in good shape—which I haven’t been since you dug me up. I have these dizzy spells, and I feel faint as I did yesterday morning when I didn’t know what time it was, even.”

“Do you have a human body inside?” asked Rockman suddenly.

“Yes.”

“Fashioned after William Rockman’s, I suppose.”

“Yes.”

“Then,” said the captain, satisfied, “no doubt you just need a good meal. The Rockmans’ are heavy eaters. Had you thought of that?”

The jet-ship was in a long glide. Able looked at Rockman, and Able’s eyes were big and round. “I hadn’t thought of that,” he said.

“I’ll get hold of my bootlegger and start feeding you,” Rockman promised, “so you can give us the formula without any hitch. But we’re landing now, and the first thing for you to do is go with me to Colonel Holt and give him your

story along with the formula, if you can recall it."

"I won't have any trouble," Able said solemnly.

"That will clear me and Major William Rockman, and it will put the formula into official hands." He stood up, expanding his chest. "This is a good day for the Metagalaxy," he said. Then he remembered. "Don't say anything about eating. The colonel is death on regular food—and that's what you need!"

Able was looking at him. "You're very much like Major William," he murmured admiringly. "Kind of firm but quite childish at times. You have the Rockman nose too—like mine."

The captain stared at him. "Good heavens. Is it that bad?"

THE SHIP had stopped. They got off at the thirty-six o'clock in the morning and take-off time for the *Dimensioneer* was fifty chronos.

Rockman and Able got into the elevator at the ground floor. Ten minutes later they walked into Colonel Holt's office. Rockman was in front of Able. He passed Major Fisher's desk and the major glanced up and then quickly back to some papers. The major's eyes were

more bulgy than usual, and Rockman thought he acted as if he had swallowed a mouse.

"Yes," said Able aloud. "Personally I'd like to see that."

Rockman stared at Able and then said behind his hand, "If you must read my mind around Fisher, don't answer aloud."

They stopped before the colonel's desk. The colonel's sharp gray eyes looked up. Rockman saluted. The colonel returned it and said, "Sit down, Captain. Any report?"

"Yes, sir. The Snakes have been uncovered by intelligence. Also, sir,"—he drew a deep breath—"I have at last secured the formula for navigation in the Void—" A horrible thought struck him—"unless this man is fooling me."

"Don't worry," said Able, turning his soulful eyes on Rockman. "Your engineers can verify it within three or four chronos."

The colonel was on his feet, his eyes shining. He put out his hand. "Congratulations, Captain. You may see service on El Phekras yet."

But Major Fisher was on his feet. He was staring at Able. "This man—" he said to the colonel, but Able pointed a forefinger at him and a small

electric spark made a loud snap as it jumped to the Major's nose. The major grunted, swallowed and looked at the colonel. The colonel cleared his throat and looked away. But the major was not a man to give up without a fight. Now he recovered abruptly and advanced on Rockman with an air of triumph.

"I formally charge Captain Rockman with violation of Metagalactic Regulation No. 48, Section 13, Paragraph 9, as follows: 'It is prohibited for any officer to use food for purposes other than nourishment or sustenance. Any so-called food designed to appeal to the senses of taste, sight, smell, feeling, or hearing its forbidden, and possession thereof shall render the officer who possesses it subject to court-martial and reduction of rank.'"

Major Fisher finished this recital and looked complacently at Colonel Holt. The colonel looked harassed.

"What are you driving at?" asked Rockman, and there was an edge to his voice.

"You," said the major triumphantly, "left part of a ham sandwich hidden in your desk." He turned righteously to Holt. "I charge this officer with vio-

lation of the regulation quoted."

The bottom dropped from under Rockman. Suddenly he felt weak. His first inclination, to hate the major intensely, was overcome by what he foresaw. He was charged with an offense that would subject him to court-martial. It was only ten chronos to takeoff time; he would be relieved of his post and grounded. What would future generations think of the 690th? Would they say Earth's crack outfit had had a coward for a division commander? Would they say that a Rockman, after all those incredible generations of unbroken service in space, had turned yellow? Rockman was sick.

Fisher was gloating. "I turned the evidence over to you this morning, sir," he said to the colonel. "One ham sandwich with one bite removed, and the bread which plainly showed identifying toothmarks."

THE COLONEL looked very uncomfortable. Fisher was like a prizefighter pressing in to the kill. But the stranger spoke up. "Are you Major Fisher?" he asked. His eyes had a queer, mother-of-pearl look to them, and Rockman

realized with an odd shiver that Able was reading Fisher's mind.

Fisher's eyes went wide with indignation. "I arrest this man!" He started forward, but Rockman stepped in front of him.

"He's my prisoner," said Rockman.

Able stepped out from behind Rockman. His hands were clasped in front of him and the overcoat was hanging through the loop. "You are the one," he said to Fisher, "who for four years has been telling the Snakes everything that Captain Rockman has reported and planned. You are the one who has made it possible for the Snakes to obstruct Rockman's search for the stone."

Fisher stared. His face went white.

Colonel Holt stiffened. "That's treason!" he roared.

Fisher made a lunge for Able. Able didn't move outwardly, but a great spark leaped from his pock-marked nose. It took Fisher in the chest, and this time it sizzled and burned. Fisher's mouth opened once, and he dropped. Fisher was dead. Able tried to look apologetic.

Rockman swallowed, but the colonel was muttering some-

thing about "unprovoked attack."

"Able is an officer in Metagalactic Intelligence," Rockman said finally.

The colonel looked up. His face began to clear. "All right," he said. "I'll call the engineers to talk to him about the formula. No matter what he's guilty of, if he has the formula nobody's going to hurt him. We'll get him out of this, all right. Captain, you get ready to leave while I go argue with the M.P.'s."

"You've forgotten, sir." Rockman stood stiffly at attention. "I have been charged. Shall I report to division headquarters under arrest, sir?"

He looked at the Major's body and then at the stretcher-men coming across the room. "The late major gave me part of a ham sandwich and I put it in the bottom drawer of my desk." He bent over and pulled out the drawer and then looked up at Rockman with innocent bewilderment on his face. "My goodness, it's gone." He patted his lips ostentatiously with a handkerchief. "Afraid the charge will have to be dropped, Captain. The evidence has disappeared."

THE END

FATHER IMAGE

Author of *Sound Decision*, *Sourdough*, etc.

The problem of making a backward people ready for independence and equality is essentially one of benevolence and paternalism. But when transposed to an interplanetary scale, the definition of benevolent paternalism may be shocking!

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

THE MORNING the Bulstrodes were due to arrive on Malok IV, Swift woke up sobbing. It was nothing new. The nightmares and the sobbing had been going on for almost the whole of Swift's five-year stay as Resident Admin-

istrator, and probably the natives thought it was quite normal for a Terran to have unhappy dreams.

It was the same dream as always: the stern-faced, white-haired old man approaching him with a whip, and dealing



him a blow across the face, raising a red, angry welt on his cheek—and immediately begging forgiveness. And the retaliation: Swift striking the old man, knocking him down, bolting out of the room without looking back.

Swift wasn't much on dream-interpretation, but he had an idea that the nightmares had their root in the conflict he sensed mounting within himself over the impending termination of his mission. He was aware of his responsibilities, but the prospect of having to carry them out terrified him.

The dreams, he thought, are fitting punishment.

He would have liked to call on his Sector Commander, conveniently located on neighboring Mabk III, for advice and help. But that was out of the question. Swift had resolved firmly that for once he'd carry out a mission without leaning on the Commander for aid of any sort, and no nightmare was going to shake that vow.

The pattern was always the same: the assault with the whip, the blow, the hurried flight—and the cold sweat and the sobbing. Swift sat up in bed, and mopped his damp face with the colorful native-made batik Domuro had

given him.

He climbed out of bed. "Breakfast!" he yelled, and was gratified to hear the sound of his servant busily scurrying around in the kitchen. As Swift began to dress, dark terrors of the night started to fade.

The warm golden-red sun had risen and Swift, staring through the window of his room, saw the Maloki already out in the fields, gathering grain. It was a perfect day, he thought.

Then he looked at the calendar tacked on the wall. In big red letters scrawled over the date was the ominous notation, *Bulstrode*. He winced. He'd been hoping somehow that their journey had been called off, but they were going through with it.

Tourists, he thought derisively, and went inside to have his meal. Kandol, his houseboy, looked warmly up at him as he came in. There was a great bond of mutual affection between Swift and all the Maloki.

"Good morning," Swift said, Kandol put a steaming bowl of gruel before him.

"Good morning, sir," the houseboy said, enunciating his English with all the clarity he

could muster. "Your guests arrived last night, sir. They were placed in the Common House, since you had already gone to sleep, and they said they would call upon you as soon as they woke up this morning."

"I'll be happy to see them," Swift lied, and concentrated on his meal.

THE BULSTRODES were about as he had expected; unpleasant. Mrs. Bulstrode was large and noisy, with a golden-tan that was probably the synthetic product of some space-ship's recreation-lounge; her husband was thin and angular, with a blunt hatchet of a nose and pale, unhealthy-looking skin.

They arrived just as Swift finished his morning meal, which ended one minor anxiety for him; he had been afraid that they would be late. The punctual Maloki would be waiting for him near the rice field for their morning English lessons, and Swift had envisioned spending a fuming hour or two while the tourists slowly bestirred themselves.

"I'm Swift," he said, putting forth a hand. "Local Resident Administrator. You must be Mr. and Mrs. Bulstrode."

"That's right," Bulstrode

said.

His wife stepped forward. "We had a *terrible* trip here," she announced. "Didn't sleep a bit. And last night they put us in some old—"

"I know," Swift broke in. "The Common House. It's used for unexpected guests. The Maloki are a very hospitable people, and they keep a communal guest-house ready at all times. But it's not too appealing to Terrans."

He smiled and flicked an appraising glance from Bulstrode male to Bulstrode female. Their presence disturbed him.

Malok IV had been opened to tourists two years before, but the Bulstrodes were the first to take advantage of it. Not surprising, in one respect, since space was full of more interesting places than this small agrarian world. But the decision of the Bulstrodes to visit there coincided suspiciously with the scheduled termination of Swift's mission six months hence, and that was what troubled him. Were they here to spy on him? The Sector Commander, that wily, unreliable old fox, might well be aware of Swift's weakness.

"Is there any sort of recreation on this planet?" Mrs. Bulstrode demanded stridently,

breaking into Swift's thoughts.

He smiled urbanely. "Not in the ordinary sense," he said. "The natives are very fond of singing, and they gather in the evenings. They have wonderful voices."

"Is that *all*?"

Swift shrugged his shoulders. "They live the simple life here on Malok, Mrs. Bulstrode. I have a small library of sensotapes which you're welcome to use for the duration of your stay." He frowned—invisibly, he hoped. "Just how long *do* you plan to stay on Malok IV?"

Mr. Bulstrode smiled balefully. "A day, a week, a month," he said. "We'll stay until we get bored."

"Oh," Swift said, barely managing to repress a gasp of pain. "Oh . . . that's just fine."

HELP CAME a moment later in the form of Domuro, the tall, handsome young Maloki who was Swift's closest companion among the natives. Sensitive, perceptive Domuro, with a high-order grasp of semantics, had been the first of his people to learn English, and he had already begun to teach the language to other Maloki. Domuro was the main reason why Swift was sure the Maloki

no longer needed his guiding hand; once the race could produce a Domuro, they were on their way toward maturity.

But Domuro was the cause of Swift's troubles, too. The intellectual companionship they enjoyed, and Swift's general fondness for Maloki life, had made the Terran reluctant to leave Malok IV even though his time was up. He had nearly confessed this to his Sector Commander one morning, but in feverish last-minute terror he had turned off the transmitter before contact had been made.

"Morning, Boss," Domuro said jauntily, bounding up the stairs. Lately Domuro had taken to watching Swift's sensotapes, and he was revelling in Terran colloquialisms. "How's everything?"

"Just fine," Swift said, repeating his phrase of a moment before. He turned to the Bulstrodes. "This is Domuro," he said. "My chief assistant, and a close friend. Domuro, these are the Bulstrodes—Earth-people like myself."

"Pleased to meet you," Domuro said glibly.

"You speak very well, young man," Mrs. Bulstrode observed.

"Why—thanks," Domuro said.

"I'm sorry that I'll have to leave you," Swift told the Bulstrodes. "But it's time for my regular morning classes, and my pupils will be terribly disappointed if I don't show up."

"You run along then, Mr. Swift," Mrs. Bulstrode said pleasantly. "We haven't unpacked yet, anyway."

SWIFT WAS glad to get away from them. After five years among the Maloki, he felt vaguely uncomfortable in the presence of Terrans, particularly such grade-A bores as the Bulstrodes promised to be.

"Who are they?" Domuro asked, as they headed down the winding path to the place where Swift held his classes.

"Nuisances," Swift said. "They're rich Terrans who don't have anything better to do than wander around space looking for new things to be bored by."

Domuro chuckled and frowned at the same time—a reaction Swift interpreted with ease as meaning that he was both amused and bewildered by the complexities of the Terran mind.

They walked on in silence for a while, and Swift's hands began to quiver in anxiety.

He realized what had been done to him, and it was painful.

I've been triggered.

Whether the Bulstrodes were spies from the Commander or not, Swift knew now that he would have to break off this emotional transference and return to the dispassionate aloofness of the true Resident. He would have to take the forceful steps necessary for termination of the mission; if he kept on in the path he'd been following, he would soon be incompetent as a Resident.

The arrival of the Bulstrodes had pushed him, had awakened him to the necessity of severing relations with the Maloki. Spies or tourists, they had triggered the reaction. What would follow would be unpleasant but necessary.

"You're very quiet," Domuro observed after they had left the village and had broken into the blue-green sea of grain that adjoined. "Worried?"

Swift made no reply.

"What's eating you, Chief?" Domuro pressed.

Maybe I should call the Commander, Swift thought. He shuddered. *No. Impossible.* He glanced at Domuro. "Quiet, will you?" he snapped suddenly.

"Let me think."

"Okay," the Maloki said.
"Don't bite my head off."

Swift wanted to apologize for his brusqueness, but he didn't. He couldn't allow himself such luxuries any more, now that the time for transition had come.

THE LESSON went painlessly enough. Swift got some rudimentary alphabet-drills going, then announced that Domuro would take over, and sat down. Domuro rose obligingly and put his fellow tribesmen through their ABCs flawlessly for half an hour, at which time Swift announced that the lesson was at its end.

The natives dispersed almost at once, and Swift found himself alone with Domuro and Estelinna, the small, handsome girl Domuro shortly was going to marry. Swift had long acknowledged a curious, unvoiced jealousy of Estelinna; she took up time he would have liked to spend with Domuro, the only Maloki who could hold a conversation with him as an equal.

"Short lesson today, Boss," Domuro commented.

"I wasn't in the mood," Swift said. A bird of rainbow plumage broke from the clump of

yellow-leaved trees in back of them, and flapped low over their heads, cawing mockingly. To forestall further conversation, Swift turned and walked away.

"See you tonight, Chief?" Domuro called after him.

Swift stopped. He had forgotten. Tonight was the night for his regular weekly meeting with Domuro, during which they discussed the week's progress in the various projects Swift had under way, and planned the week's work.

"I'll be there," Swift said.
"Usual time."

"Right, Boss." Domuro put his arm around Estelinna, and drew her close. Swift headed across the ricefield, wondering what was the right step to take, wondering if the Maloki would ever forgive him for what he was going to do.

He spat harshly. *Bulstrodes!*

"WE'RE SO glad to see you again," Mrs. Bulstrode said. "Your native boy has been entertaining us with his songs. We'd like to ask you something."

Swift met her eye levelly. She was a simpering fool, and her husband was an ass. How could they possibly be spies? "Yes, Mrs. Bulstrode?"

"We were wondering—if we could look in on your classes—tomorrow, perhaps? We'd like so much to see how you've achieved all these wonderful things here on Malok."

"Of course," Swift forced himself to say. It was midday now, and the heat was intense. He started to sweat. So they wanted to observe, eh? He was forced to re-evaluate his conclusion of a moment before. Fools they might be, but they could be carefully-chosen fools.

He determined to get things under way. Domuro was the first victim.

The young Maloki showed up, punctual as always, on the dot of eight. The sun was long since down, and the smaller moon glowed lemon-yellow in the lower corner of the sky; a few hours more and its jagged-edged companion would begin its diagonal climb as well. Up from the fields drifted the soft, musical chanting of the natives, and the harmonic strumming of the banjos Swift had shown them how to build.

"Here I am, Chief."

At the sound of Domuro's voice, Swift marshalled his wandering attention and drew himself up stiffly. "Oh—Domuro."

"Right on time," Domuro said, grinning.

Swift stared at him coldly. "Even including your detour to Estelinna's hut?" he said. "You're amazingly punctual."

"What do you mean by that?"

Swift coughed deliberately, almost contemptuously. "I don't think it needs explaining. You know the stories that have been going around. Is there any truth in them?"

"What?" Domuro shook his head worriedly. "What are you talking about, chief?"

Forgive me, Swift thought. "You and Estelinna," he said. "You know that sort of conduct doesn't go."

Swift saw Dumuro turn almost white with indignation in the half-darkness. "If you think that Estelinna and I have been—"

"I didn't accuse you," Swift said. "I merely said there have been stories. At the moment; your morals are under a cloud." Swift stood up. "Therefore," he went on smoothly, "I'm afraid that I'll have to break off our relationship for a while, until these rumors are cleared up. After all, it can hurt progress on Malok if I'm associated with a man whose morals

are open to some question and who—”

“You can’t mean this, Boss! Our plans, our programs—”

“They will have to continue without you, Domuro. I think I’ve said enough.”

Swift made a curt gesture of dismissal, and without further protest Domuro left. Swift heard the sound of a half-swallowed sob come floating back to him on the night air, and he was alone.

He sat there a long while, staring at the lonely moon. When its companion rose, Swift went inside.

The dream returned again that night. The look on the old man’s face as he begged Swift to forgive him was heart-wrenching. Swift responded as always, striking out blindly and uncomprehendingly, and then he awoke.

THE BULSTRODES observed his classes the next day, as scheduled. Swift was deeply annoyed to find them present; the process was delicate enough without the additional burden of the Bulstrodes on his shoulders.

He put the Maloki through their paces mercilessly under the blazing sun, conducting a

formal spelling bee. He kept up the pressure for almost three hours, while the Bulstrodes squirmed and figeted on the log they were seated on. Finally, almost at mealtime, he called a halt.

The little class of natives was even more exhausted than he was by the time the ordeal was over. Swift watched as they straggled away, and then he turned to the Bulstrodes.

“This is the way we hold classes on Malok IV,” he said.

Mrs. Bulstrode emitted a short, explosive burst of air and said, “Well! You certainly practice an *intensified* program, Mr. Swift.”

“It’s the only way to progress,” Swift said blandly. “We have such a short time to spend on these planets, you know.”

They started walking back to Swift’s residence. After a moment or two, Mrs. Bulstrode edged up to Swift and said, “You know, Mr. Swift, one of the native girls came to see me this morning just before we set out to class. The small, pretty one—Estelinna, I think.”

Swift cocked an eye. “Oh?”

“She seemed very disturbed. She said you had made some remarks about her to Domuro

last night, and she couldn't understand why you said what you did. I don't mean to pry, but—"

"I understand," said Swift. "The girl's a worthless slut. I'm only trying to protect Domuro."

Lay it on thick, he told himself savagely. His fingers started to tremble.

Mrs. Bulstrode coughed noisily. "She seemed nice enough to me, Mr. Swift. The poor thing was trying hard to keep back the tears, and she could barely manage."

"Don't waste your sympathy," Swift said. "These Maleki are deceptive."

They continued walking in silence. Swift could see that the Bulstrodes were troubled over the strange, callous behavior of the Resident Administrator, but that they didn't quite know how to convey their unrest.

Good, Swift thought. *Let them keep all their puzzlement bottled up inside themselves. I have enough of my own.*

BY NOW he had achieved a certain degree of detachment toward the whole problem of his departure. As the days passed, though, the nagging consciousness of the possibility

of failure loomed larger in his mind.

He had achieved everything he had set out to achieve on Malok IV. But he feared that he was not bringing about the severance as successfully as he had the teaching, and the time for leaving was drawing near. *I'm too softhearted*, he told himself, and vowed to toughen. It was the only thing to do.

The Bulstrodes had settled down into a comfortable routine on Malok, and they showed no signs of leaving. Swift grew used to their continued presence.

Mrs. Bulstrode served as a sort of housemother for the whole village, patching bruised knees and bruised love affairs with equal facility until the day Swift asked her to stop meddling with the natives. He thought that might get rid of her, but it didn't; she simply withdrew huffily, and she and her husband were cold and aloof thenceforth.

For some reason, the dreams had stopped almost completely. Swift's nighttime woes were over—but the days were hellish. He was secure in the knowledge of what he had to do, but one lingering, agonizing doubt remained: *What happens after I*

leave?

He continued to hold classes, and the Bulstrodes attended occasionally. After one of the longest and most intense sessions, a prolonged lesson in grammar, Mrs. Bulstrode finally managed to express some of her pent-up puzzlement.

"Tell me," she said, and her vast form made Swift feel hopelessly thin and scrawny. "Don't you feel that you're being just a little too harsh on these people, Mr. Swift."

Swift shook his head. "No. The method works."

She frowned. "You mean, they can read and write. But do they enjoy learning? Do they look forward to their lessons?"

"It's no longer matters," Swift said enigmatically.

THE FIRST confirmation of impending success came that evening, when Domuro visited him. Domuro had not approached him since that evening, weeks before, when Swift had made his implied charges of immoral conduct, and Swift felt self-conscious and unhappy when he heard his erstwhile companion rapping on his door.

"What is it, Domuro?" he asked tonelessly.

"May I talk to you a minute, Mr. Swift?"

Swift toyed with the idea of refusing, then slipped into sandals and came out on the porch. The air was cool; summer was ending. "What's on your mind?"

Domuro sat down, easily, with the assured grace of his people. "I'm troubled, sir."

"About what?"

Domuro spread his hands. "Why have you changed, Mr. Swift?"

No longer the colloquial "Boss," Swift noticed. *Mr. Swift, now.* "Changed, Domuro?"

"You're not the way you used to be. You don't smile any more. The lessons are long, and hard. My friends are grumbling. You're cold to us, where once you were warm. Can you explain this?"

Swift stared levelly at the young man, and it was all he could do to repress a smile of relief. *The treatment has worked, after all.* "There's no explanation necessary, Domuro."

"None?"

"My feelings toward you and your people have not changed one bit," Swift asserted firmly. He saw a shadow of

utter disbelief and confusion pass briefly across Domuro's face, and felt a momentary sense of triumph. The time had come now to make the break final.

HE SET things in motion two days later. The Bulstrodes objected violently when they found out, and at length Swift had to be nasty in order to get them out of his hair.

"You *can't* do that to the girl," Mrs. Bulstrode said. She planted herself solidly in his path.

"The girl is a liar and a thief," Swift said icily. "She must be punished, for the good of the community."

"But look here, Swift," Bulstrode said, making one of his rare contributions to the conversation. "You're not sure the girl really did steal your watch, are you?"

"Maybe your houseboy took it," Mrs. Bulstrode suggested. "Maybe you misplaced it. You can't punish her on such flimsy grounds."

Swift met her eye firmly. "Will you please get yourself out of my way—or will I have to walk around you?"

She moved to one side, and Swift headed for the door. As he stepped out on the porch, he

heard her say, "I want you to know that I intend to report you to your Sector Commander at once!"

Swift chuckled. "Go right ahead," he said.

He headed up the dirt road to the central square in the midst of the village. When he got there, he saw that the whole tribe was already assembled. They formed a loose ring around the square, and as Swift appeared the muttering of the crowd died down and was replaced by a crisp, crackling silence. The faces of the Maloki were cold and menacing.

Domuro was waiting for him at the rise in the road. He ran up and took Swift's arm.

"Don't punish her," Domuro said agitatedly. "I stole the watch! I took it!"

"You're only making things worse," Swift said. "I *know* Estelinna took it. Go get her."

Domuro looked at him bitterly for a moment, and then turned and walked slowly toward Estelinna's hut. Swift, in the meantime, took his place at the center of the ring.

He was carrying a light, flexible twig, about three feet long. He flicked it through the air a couple of times, keeping

his face an emotionless mask all the while. The crowd was terribly silent.

Dumuro appeared, leading Estelinna. She was sobbing quietly, and Domuro's own eyes showed the silvery glitter of half-dried tears.

"Bring her here," Swift commanded. Domuro, his teeth set and his jaws clenched, brought the girl over to him. She knelt before him, and looked up piteously.

"I didn't do it," she murmured. "Why can't you believe me?"

Swift sucked in his breath. "Take off her jacket," he said. Domuro started to say something, then bent obediently and unfastened the wrap with a hasty, nervous motion.

Swift started for a moment at the girl's bare back, and raised the whip. Without allowing himself to think of what he was doing, he brought it down. There was the sharp *crack* of the whip's impact against the girl's back. He heard her moan softly, and a pencil-thin, flaming-red line sprang out along her skin.

He lifted the whip a second time. Then he felt it seized from behind and twisted roughly from his hand, and a mo-

ment later the whole tribe seemed to be clawing at him, unleashing their rage in a savage attack.

"IT'S YOUR own fault," he heard Mrs. Bulstrode say vindictively. Her voice cut piercingly through the gray fog of pain that surrounded him. "You goaded them into attacking you."

Swift opened one eye and glared at her as best he could. He was a mass of bruises and miseries, and even breathing was painful. The incensed Maloki had given him quite a drubbing.

"You'll be glad to know that we've just been in contact with your Sector Commander. We told him about the horrid way you've been treating the natives, and what they did to you when you whipped that poor girl. He said he'd be right down from Malok III to relieve you." Mrs. Bulstrode's arms were crossed triumphantly; she was glorying in Swift's downfall.

"He said he'd be right down, eh?"

"Yes. He seemed very upset. You should be grateful to us—we saved your life. When we heard the shouting, my husband and I came running and man-

aged to pull them off you."

"Many thanks," Swift said feebly. "Much obliged."

"But we warned you!" she continued relentlessly. "And now your mission has ended in failure!"

Swift decided he had had enough of the Bulstrodes. He struggled up in bed and transfixed her with a contemptuous glare. "You poor fool! Can't you see that I've been *successful*?"

That jarred her. She turned to her husband incredulously and snorted, "Ridiculous!"

Just then, a good-sized rock came flying through the window, wrapped in a grimy piece of paper. It scattered glass everywhere and struck the far wall, from which it rebounded and rolled under Swift's bed.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd find that for me," Swift said.

Automatically, Mr. Bulstrode knelt, fished under the bed, and scooped out the rock. He unwrapped the note and handed it to Swift. "Successful, eh?" his wife said "Some success!"

Swift looked at the note. Written in Domuro's typical, cramped handwriting, it said, *Go back to Earth, Boss Swift.* That was all.

SWIFT HELD the note in one hand, the rock in the other. "These two objects," he said, choosing his words carefully, "are the symbols of my success here."

Mrs. Bulstrode blinked. "Explain yourself."

Swift held forth the paper. "This shows that they've learned to read, to write—the first steps on the road to maturity."

"And the rock?"

"Ah," Swift said, smiling despite the pain. "The second symbol. It tells me that they've completed the growing-up process: they've learned to reject me as a father-image and do things for themselves."

Mrs. Bulstrode stared with utter lack of comprehension. "You deliberately . . . deliberately . . ."

"Look," Swift said. "In order to wind up my mission here, I had to get the Maloki to reject me. This is the way the Resident Administrator system works. They had to kick me out when they were ready, and step out on their own without further help from me. For a long time, I was too nice to them, so I became nasty to cushion the shock of my departure. I made them hate me.

And finally, by punishing a girl everyone knew was innocent, I triggered the final outburst. The Maloki hate me like poison—but what I taught them will stick. They've matured now."

Swift sat back, coughing. A shock of pain ran through him. *I did the thing too well*, he thought. *They gave me an overdose of rejection*. He looked down at the bruises on his arms.

"In growing up," Swift said, "the impact of the discovery that you're on your own two legs is tremendous. There will be a period of adjustment, during which the Maloki are going to be all mixed up inside, unable to understand why I suddenly became so unpleasant, unable to fathom my reasons for turning on them. And they'll be obsessed by guilt for what they did to me. But it'll wear off quickly. After a while, they'll understand."

The words rolled easily from him, but as their implication struck him he stopped and stared ahead bleakly. The Maloki had been manipulated like children—but *who manipulates the manipulators?*

A sound in the hallway broke the taut silence. Mrs. Bulstrode said gleefully, "I think your

Commander is here."

AS THE door started to open, Swift, numb with the shock of the emotions that were sweeping over him, closed his eyes, blotting out the loathsome Bulstrodes. He saw once again that stern old man with the whip. Swift's head reeled.

"Hello, Donald," he heard a familiar deep voice say.

Slowly, hesitantly, he opened his eyes. The image of the stern old man was still in the room—this time, without the whip. He was smiling. "You were just fine," he said. "A swell job."

Swift shook his head in wonderment. He remembered now; the final trigger had been sprung. He remembered the bitter experience he had shoved into his subconscious, where it would have no shattering impact on his mind. The memories came flooding back—only now they no longer stung. Now he could accept reality, for he understood.

The Bulstrodes glanced curiously at each other and backed to a corner of the room.

"I'll be damned," Swift said, grinning at the Sector Commander. "Remember, just before I left for Malok IV?"

"How could I forget?"

"The arguments we had, the quarrels, your sudden coldness—it never occurred to me till now that you were putting me through the same growth process I would later use on the Maloki."

"It had to be that way, Don," the Sector Commander said. "You had the potential to be one of the finest members of our Corps—just as the Maloki are potentially one of the finest races in the Galaxy. But if you had kept heading along in the same track, with your old dependency unbroken, you'd have failed here. I had to take steps to make you realize that potential. Otherwise, with my headquarters in the same system, you would have come buzzing over to Malok III to ask my advice on every troublesome point. That couldn't be. A Resident Administrator has to shoulder his own problems."

"Yes," Swift said softly. "Of course." He realized at last that he'd learned. He'd coped with the problems of teaching the

Maloki, and then he'd coped with his own deep love for them and had forced himself to take the steps that would make him hateful to them.

In doing so, he had grown. There remained only one problem more, only one stumbling-block on the way to full maturity.

He struggled out of bed, ignoring the gaping Bulstrodes, ignoring the fiery bolts of pain that shot up and down his body, and crossed the room unsteadily.

"I understand," he said. "The Maloki hate me now, but when they see what I've done for them, they'll forgive me."

"And will you forgive *me*?" the old man asked.

"Of course," Swift said, seeing the image of the tyrant with the whip explode and vanish like the fantasy it was, seeing behind it the familiar face of the tall man on whom he'd depended so long—but no longer.

"I forgive you—*Dad*."

THE END

A JACKO FOR McCOY



by ALAN BARCLAY

THE HANGAR crew gathered round as usual to watch McCoy climb into his ship. Getting in through a round hole two feet three inches in diameter while encased in a stiff, unbending pressure suit was a job many a good pilot

could make a hash of—especially when in the tensed-up state of a man going out on patrol. McCoy made it look simple. An upward jump to grasp the horizontal bar, body swung upward with knees bent, feet through the hole, then swing forward.

A pull and a wriggle, and he was inside. The manhole closed with a thud. Three minutes to worm his way forward into the pilot position, then his impersonal voice over the hangar Tannoy:

"Wheel her out, boys."

The men heaved on the drawbars, and the long shining shape of the T42 slid on its trolley towards the far end of the hangar, where the gaping hole of the blast-shaft opened to admit it. Slide the slender ship into the blast-shaft, rather like loading a cartridge into the chamber of a rifle, then close the airtight door.

Ship Control, sitting in a little dome on the surface of the asteroid that was Advanced Fighter Base, knew by the winking of a green light that the blast-shaft had been closed. He pressed a button which opened the space-side door. Then he leaned towards his desk-phone and called McCoy:

"Hangar door sealed; surface door open—clear to blast."

The word came back immediately: "Blasting off."

The hangar crew heard a sort of muffled thud—Ship Control saw a streak of flame flare from the blast-shaft and trail away outwards among the stars, rap-

idly dwindling in size till it disappeared. McCoy was off on patrol again.

McCoy was a living denial of the laws of statistics, which said no scout pilot survives more than six months' service. McCoy had lasted two and a half years.

He lay comfortably relaxed on the pilot's couch. This was such familiar routine stuff that he hardly needed to think about what he was doing. His two hands grasped the controls and juggled them gently. His eyes moved round the instruments, over to his radar-sweep, forward and sideways and downward through the glassite nose, then back again over the instruments. He was past the thinking stage, past the stage of being frightened, past the stage of wishing or hoping for anything. On his first patrol a pilot is nervous and restless. After killing a couple of Jackoes he becomes over-confident and talkative. After twenty patrols and after seeing some of his companions fried by the Jacko rays, he becomes silent and jittery. After that, if he is still alive, he gets the twitch so badly that the medics send him back down home. Usually, however, he doesn't live long enough

to get sent home.

McCoy had passed through all those phases. Somehow he had passed through his attack of the twitch without being spotted by the medics, and without being cooked by any of the Jacko patrols. He had emerged into a state of fatalistic calm. He had seen all his friends killed. He no longer took his entitlement of leave. He drank very little and talked hardly at all. He had thirty-seven kills to his credit, twice as many as any other pilot.

He headed out towards the asteroid belt—this was usually good hunting country, for while he lay there no radar-sweep could distinguish his ship from the tumbling stream of rocks and boulders around him. The Jacko ships came sneaking inwards towards the inner planets from the direction of Aries—nobody knew exactly where they came from—and could be punched on from this ambush.

HE LURKED there for three days. The air purifier purred gently; the thin beam of the radar-sweep moved round and round and up and down in its transparent bowl. He lay for hours on his couch, motionless except for the small

movement of his head as he watched the radar and his instruments. At the end of every twenty-four hours he sent a brief signal back to Base. What he thought about during these long hours of waiting nobody ever knew. It is probable that he didn't think at all, any more than a leopard does as it crouches along the branch of a tree, waiting for its prey to come to the water-hole.

In the middle of the fourth day a small moving dot appeared at extreme radar range. He stirred a little when he saw it. He marked its track and noted that it would pass through the belt some distance ahead of his position. He fired jets and moved forward to be in position to intercept.

The blob was far away. For ten hours he watched it creep nearer. He did not shift his position again, for by now the Jacko would have his radar active, sweeping the Belt for signs of movement.

The ship began to show big in the radar bowl. McCoy risked another quick shift of position to bring him right on to its track.

For as long as he could watch, it coasted steadily forward without any change of

speed or direction, then the blob it made on the radar-sweep passed behind a large chunk of rock about eight hundred feet in diameter. When it reappeared it would be in plain sight—that would be the moment to attack. McCoy switched off the radar, eased himself a little on his couch and directed his eyes downward and ahead—down towards the lump of rock which was blanketing the enemy. He was tense now; if he had been the leopard in the tree his tail would have twitched stiffly...

The Jacko ship slid into view. It was only a few miles away. Sunlight shone on its scarlet flank.

He pushed the levers steadily forward till he had four G acceleration. It seemed as if his own ship lay still while the enemy began to come swiftly towards him. He juggled the controls, his radial jets fired briefly so that the ship seemed to wriggle itself sideways and the enemy moved across his field of view till it lay plumb in the middle of his sights.

In another ten seconds he would fire his guns—in six seconds—in four—then a long pencil of blue flame leapt from the stern of the enemy. It slid across his sights; it surged out

of view.

He swept smoothly round and down—and there it was again, but turning too fast to get his sights on it. But McCoy was too old a hand at the game to panic. He continued, turning, swerving and swooping, up, round, down and sideways, although out here in deep space there was precious little meaning to any of those directions.

He kept hard on the Jacko's tail. The Jacko was no raw beginner; his ship turned and twisted and dived and rolled with skilled precision. McCoy kept after it, ready to take advantage of the first mistake the other should make—and there was the mistake! The Jacko steadied on to a straight course. McCoy pressed the stud; a pair of seventy-five millimeter high-velocity projectiles went screaming down the muzzles.

But the very instant he fired he saw a streak of flame from one of the Jacko's radial jets, and it swung out of line.

A few minutes later the Jacko steadied again, and again McCoy fired. Once more the enemy jerked itself out of line at the last instant. McCoy tumbled to the Jacko's game; he was tempting his pursuer to

waste ammunition. He gave a little grunt of respect—it was a game that called for hair-trigger timing. When the enemy tried the same maneuver again McCoy came on after him without firing.

These maneuvers carried the two ships over immense distances, and although once more McCoy was on the point of getting a line on the Jacko, the two ships were hurtling in among a closely packed group of asteroids before he got into firing position. The rocks were sprinkled over a considerable volume of space and ranged in diameter from a few feet to five or six miles.

McCoy had to take his eye off the enemy ahead to estimate the positions of these hazards, and while he glanced swiftly round the Jacko disappeared.

Immediately he realized that the game had taken a new turn. It was no longer a simple case of keeping on the enemy's tail till he ran him down. Now the enemy was out of sight behind some tumbling rocks that lay all around and above, and from behind any one of these his killer-ray might lick out to fry and burn him.

He regulated speed so as to be moving with the same veloci-

ty as the rocks around his ship. Then he cut his jets and floated with the debris, watching the group of asteroids behind which the Jacko had disappeared.

But distances are great in space, relative velocities are hard to estimate, and there is no real meaning to the words up and down and sideways.

McCoy, LYING on his narrow padded tube, spared a fleeting glance at the mirror which served as an eye in the back of his head, and saw a stubby, sharp-nosed red shape glide swiftly towards him from behind and above. With the old fighter's instinct for doing the right thing McCoy fired the braking jet. A long flame shot from the nozzle just beneath him and he felt as if a large hand thrust the ship savagely backwards. The Jacko ray stabbed across his bow. He fired the lateral jets, rear-port, forward-starboard, and the ship spun round. He caught just a fleeting glimpse of the enemy and loosed off a pair of shots at him. His finger stabbed at the buttons to fire the alternate pair of jets, swinging the ship back in the opposite direction—the enemy was just gliding out of sight behind a hunk of rock. He steadied and fired, but

missed again.

So this deadly game of hide and seek continued—it had to continue. Whichever ship ceased maneuvering must expect the other to work round on to his tail, and neither dared be first to run out into clear space for the same reason.

And meantime there was the problem of fuel, becoming more and more urgent with every blast of the jets. A space-scout spends most of its time coasting at constant velocity. It uses up fuel during blast-off, a considerable quantity on return to Base, and small amounts to accomplish changes of direction, but very large quantities are expended during combat maneuvers. McCoy watched the needle of his fuel guage drop down and down until it was near the minimum amount needed to set a course back to Base—then saw it pass below.

But there was nothing he could do except continue the hunt more relentlessly than ever, hoping that he might first plug the Jacko, then send a radio signal to Base for help.

Dodging and swerving among the tumbling boulders of the asteroid stream he caught several glimpses of the enemy ship and fired shots at it. Twice he

just avoided being sliced by his opponent's ray. By this time he did not really hope to survive the encounter. The Jacko was just a little too fast for him and even if he plugged him and managed to send a signal to Base, it was doubtful whether his air would last till rescuers reached him. He did not experience any feeling of fear or regret; in fact, he felt something resembling satisfaction, for this enemy was a worthy adversary—slick, daring, skillful.

But he was not finished yet. His thinking concentrated to a single sharp focus—keep after the Jacko and plug him before the fuel and ammunition ran out.

The needle of the fuel guage dropped nearer and nearer the zero mark. McCoy took more and more chances. Every glimpse he got of the red ship he fired—to be out of fuel with ammunition unexpended, or to be out of ammunition with some fuel left—either of these would be equally final and fatal.

He fired his last pair of shots. Knowing they were his last, he swerved the ship meaning to tuck himself in among a huddle of rocks where he might escape discovery, but before the

turn was half completed the jets spluttered and died...

So he waited, powerless, helpless, unarmed, drifting. He thought it would not be more than two or three minutes before the enemy emerged from cover to make a swift slash at him. When he made no attempt to fight back, the Jacko would understand immediately and close in for a finish. McCoy closed his eyes and relaxed. He thought of all his friends fried by the Jacko rays, killed in ships that split their seams, or lost in deep space—and those who'd blown up on blast-off or crashed on *return*. He thought of Earth and its green fields and the people in cities going to work every morning...

Presently he realized that more than three minutes had passed. He looked around. There was a very large asteroid, several miles in diameter over on his left and below him, and several other smaller ones in sight, but no red ship.

He began to wonder whether after all he had plugged the Jacko just as it disappeared behind a rock. Or had it run for home in the end? But no Jacko had ever been known to run. He waited. There was nothing else to do.

HE WAITED an hour. He decided the Jacko must also be out of action for some reason, so he sent off a signal to Base. The radio-op acknowledged receipt and added cheerfully that a rescue craft would be sent at once. McCoy knew quite well that his chances of rescue were very slim. He had fuel to drive his air-purifiers and heaters for about forty-eight hours. He was unable to give his position exactly and the rescuer's radar-sweep could not distinguish his ship from the jumble of floating rocks among which he waited.

After sending off the signal he lay on his couch, dozing and dreaming for the most part, but occasionally, merely as a matter of routine habit, scanning the space around and above and below him.

After a long time he came rather idly to the conclusion that the large asteroid just ahead and below him was moving nearer. At first this did not seem to matter. McCoy calculated without interest and with only one corner of his mind that his ship must have a residual forward velocity relative to the asteroid, which was carrying him towards it. He estimated that the asteroid was about eight miles in diameter.

The asteroid drifted nearer. Its gravitational field, feeble though it might be, was reaching out to draw him inwards. McCoy still did not think this mattered. There was no question of a violent crash. At worst, he would experience rather a severe bump when the ship grounded. He began to consider sending another signal to Base telling the rescue ship that he was grounding on an asteroid of considerable size. He was about to switch on his radio to do this when his attention was attracted by a flash of red just within his range of vision.

It was the Jacko ship. Despite his fatalism, a spasm of purely animal fear seized him.

This meant his finish. In another instant the deadly ray would lick out and consume him. Then he saw that the enemy was immobile. It also was being drawn gently downwards on to the surface of the big asteroid. Like himself, the Jacko had exhausted his fuel and also apparently the power which operated its ray. It was circling the asteroid, nose down, helpless.

McCoy was not slow to realize the enormous importance of this situation. The war in Space had been dragging on wearily for more than twenty

years now. Tens of thousands of Earthmen had died and thousands of their ships had been destroyed. The number of Jacko ships and personnel lost was supposed to be very much less, but nevertheless it was considerable—and yet in all that time no Jacko ship, still less any living Jacko, had been captured. Jackoes blew themselves up at the instant of defeat to avoid capture—they exploded their fuel tanks. If any Jacko was unable to do this little job for himself, or if some slight reluctance to exterminate himself made him hesitate, one of his companions would invariably swoop round and do it for him.

Despite such practices, Jacko ships had been found floating intact on a few occasions, no doubt with the pilots dead inside. But some kind of proximity fuze had always detonated them whenever an Earth ship approached within two hundred yards.

Thus in twenty years the only physical mementoes of the Jackoes to be raked out of Space were fragments of twisted and melted and half-vaporized metal, and small portions of extremely overcooked Jacko.

Now here, as McCoy quickly

realized, was a complete undamaged scout, with presumably a live Jacko inside. In addition, since its fuel was exhausted, the pilot could not destroy himself and his ship in the traditional manner. In short, here was a chance to capture a complete Jacko ship, from which the secrets of their drive and their killer-ray could be learned. There perhaps might even be a live Jacko as bonus.

McCoy turned to his radio, and focussed his sending aerial as well as he could in the direction of Base. The message did not take long to send—he thought that this unique opportunity would be sufficiently attractive to bring the entire Advanced Fleet screaming over at maximum acceleration to his rescue.

After receiving acknowledgement, he took a glance downward at the asteroid. The ship was spiralling slowly inwards towards its rocky surface. The enemy ship, still nose downward, was at that instant just passing out of sight round the curve of the rock.

On a sudden impulse he switched his radio to receive, and began to spin the tuning dial. Up in the fifty-meter band he caught a swift staccato chat-

tering noise. He had heard this sound before—it was Jacko speech, or what served them for speech. It was very loud, so loud that it could only be coming from the ship nearby. Like himself, the Jacko was sending for help.

AN HOUR later the ship grounded gently. Ten minutes after that the Jacko ship did likewise. McCoy saw its downward-pointing nose strike an upjutting pinnacle of rock which sent it tumbling over and over. It finally came to rest about a hundred yards away. McCoy, who not so long ago had resigned himself to death by oxygen starvation, saw that there was still one more job for him to do.

No doubt units of the Advanced Space Fleet were already boring holes to get to him and the stranded Jacko, and no doubt from some other direction Jacko ships were beginning to build up speed to reach the same spot, but meantime if he could force a way into the enemy ship he might collect and send off some useful data concerning it.

He clamped down the bowl of his pressure suit, clipped on a full oxygen flask and lifted

an axe from its rack. Then he insinuated himself into the tiny cramped air-lock and wriggled his way out to find himself on the hard glassy rock of the asteroid. He started to crawl cautiously towards the Jacko ship. He knew that any careless movement would send him floating off the surface of the asteroid.

But the Jacko inside had no intention of waiting to be attacked. McCoy saw a dark orifice appear in the side of the red ship. A round object popped out. McCoy stared with the most extreme interest. He was the first human to see a Jacko.

The round object scuttled over the ground towards him on four short legs. As it drew near he saw it was a spherical metal construction. So he was not actually seeing a Jacko after all, but merely the Jacko version of a space-suit, with its owner curled up inside, of course. There was a little window let into the metal sphere and two appendages—thin articulated rods—protruded from it.

The two creatures, man and Jacko, drew cautiously nearer to each other. For a brief instant McCoy wondered wheth-

er the creature inside the sphere might wish to parley with him, but he was not left long in doubt as to its intention. From a distance of twenty yards it made a swift scuttling rush towards him, with one of its rod-like appendages extended. On the end was a gleaming scissor-like gadget. The creature rushed unhesitatingly towards him, the jointed rod darted towards his arm, its scissor-end snapping wickedly.

McCoy warded off the rod and swung a heavy blow at the metal sphere itself. His arm jarred as the blow fell, but the only effect was to roll the enemy four or five yards backwards. The Jacko tumbled over and over, but got back on its four feet and rushed to attack again. The scissor-like weapon snapped at his arm again. He struck at it with his axe—he was forced to leap away—then struck again heavily at the metal sphere which was once more tumbled backwards.

McCoy saw what a deadly weapon these slashing snapping blades were and decided to fight cautiously. At the same time the Jacko must have realized that another blow from McCoy's axe might split him open.

They began cautiously to cir-

cle each other. The Jacko on its four short legs was better adapted to the feeble gravity of the asteroid but McCoy's long ones were the means to leap out of range if need be. The Jacko rushed forward once more. There never had been any doubt about Jacko courage. The scissor blades snapped. McCoy measured his distance and chopped fiercely at the metal rod, aiming at the inner joint where it emerged from the sphere. The blow jarred his arm, but the keen edge of the axe sheared right through the joint.

Instantly the second articulated metal arm flailed out; this one was furnished only with a hook, but it caught the back of the axe blade and jerked it from McCoy's grasp. The violence of the jerk sent the axe whirling upwards into the black sky, where it disappeared from sight. And so here at last were members of two species who had fought each other mercilessly for twenty years, face to face at last, on an airless chunk of rock out in deep space, within a yard of one another, unarmed.

The creature shifted position; the feeble light of the distant sun shone across the win-

dow of its metal sphere; McCoy thought he saw a single eye, large, dark, and gleaming, alert with intelligence, but he wasn't sure. It was too dark.

No one could say that the Jackoes lacked courage. It rushed him again. It had no weapon now except the long slender flexible hooked rod which had been used to snatch the axe, but with this it flailed McCoy over helmet and shoulders. Protected by the thick fabric of his pressure suit, however, he scarcely felt the blows.

Then the Jacko realized it was wasting its energy and stopped. McCoy could think of nothing more to do. It was impossible to tear the metal sphere open with his bare hands. An attempt to jump on it or to kick it would merely send him floating off the surface of the asteroid. It was stalemate.

TWENTY-FOUR hours had passed. McCoy lay on his pilot-couch and watched the Radar-sweep. The bowl was sprinkled with blobs, the majority stationary, or at any rate moving very slowly relative to himself, but there were others moving purposefully across in his direction. These were the ships rushing to his rescue—

he grinned a little at this thought, for although no-one would ever be unkind enough to say so, no commander would turn out a force of that size merely to rescue a single scout. Their primary object was to get possession of the Jacko ship and if possible its pilot as well, though they must feel pretty certain that the latter would manage to commit suicide before being captured.

Whatever the motives, McCoy reflected that his chance of being rescued had considerably improved, unless... He examined the outer fringes of the radar bowl for signs of enemy ships... And there they were, coming in at a great pace. They were considerably further off than his rescuers, but nevertheless likely to arrive in time to interfere rather effectively with the process of taking off the stranded Jacko ship, not to mention the re-arming and refueling of his own.

He debated whether he should go back outside and play tag with his Jacko neighbor—it made him uneasy not to know what the resourceful little swine was up to. On the other hand, he thought a signal might be coming through for him soon. He waited in the ship, watch-

ing the radar-sweep.

It was not long before he saw the Squadron make a change of direction. This meant they had spotted the Jacko ships and were turning to intercept. Soon after that came the expected beep-beep of the radio call signal.

He switched on and aligned his antenna towards the ships.

"McCoy here," he reported.

A series of clicks, then a brisk voice spoke: "Commander Defala here. You've spotted us, I expect?"

"Yes, sir. I've just observed your change of course."

"Quite correct," the voice agreed, "we're going to jump these Jackoes converging on you, and mop the lot up..."

"I see, sir," McCoy said. He thought it had never been easy to take Jackoes unawares, and to describe the anticipated engagement as a mopping-up process was being extraordinarily optimistic. In the last couple of days he had never rated his chances of survival very high. Now he notched them down to one in ten.

"We're not overlooking your predicament, McCoy," the brisk voice continued. "I'm detaching a scout to come directly to you. It'll carry external refuel-

ing tanks and ammunition. Get yourself mobile when you get these supplies, and sit alongside that stranded Jacko till we arrive. Treat it as if it were a new-born child. You're not to destroy it on any account."

"Very good, sir," McCoy agreed.

"What's the situation exactly?" the Commander asked.

"The Jacko and I are reduced to throwing rocks at each other," McCoy replied, and described his hand to hand battle.

"Well, that's closer contact than anyone else has had since this weary war began. But keep an eye on the b—."

McCoy decided he had better do just that. He clamped his helmet tight, clipped on a new flask of oxygen, and wriggled out of his air-lock. The Jacko was just as uneasy about the situation as he was himself. They met half-way between the two ships.

McCoy sat down. The spherical enemy squatted about twenty yards from him. Idly he detached a stone from a crumbling corner of rock. He tossed it to the Jacko. It clonked against the metal shell and fell to the ground. Like lightning the flexible arm with the hook scooped it up and flung it vi-

ciously back. The hook was not a good throwing device, however, and the rock missed by yards. McCoy tossed another, quite gently. This time, instead of flinging it, the Jacko tossed it. McCoy tossed it back. He went nearer and squatted down. The enemy did likewise. McCoy thought of attempting to communicate, and recalled stories about such situations—diagrams made on sand, and suchlike. However, he was a fighter-pilot and anything he managed to communicate might later be described as being of military value. Besides, he had no sand, no paper, no writing material. He contented himself with making rude gestures. He supposed the actions made by the Jacko in response were the same. Once or twice the feeble sunlight shone into the window of the metal sphere opposite but it was never strong enough for him to get a proper look at his enemy.

He kept an eye on the sky around and on the passage of time. Finally he decided it was time to get back to the ship. He made more rude signs at the Jacko who began to retreat warily as soon as he stood up.

HE SWITCHED on the radar. The situation had

changed radically. Defala's Squadron was in position to intercept the Jacko fleet, but there was no indication that any engagement was taking place yet. A single ship, presumably the one detached to refuel him, was approaching at high speed. In addition, however, there were three blobs coming in towards him from quite another direction. These undoubtedly represented an additional Jacko menace. He switched on his radio and sent out a call. The answer came without any time lag.

"McCoy?" a voice growled, "where the hell have you been?"

"I've been playing volley ball with my favorite Jacko," McCoy told him. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"If you look in your Radar you'll see three Jacko ships have sneaked in from nowhere. They're streaking towards you from the direction opposite to me."

"I see them," McCoy agreed, "but you're a whole lot nearer."

"There's not such a hell of a lot of margin. I'll dump those tanks beside you and get off again fast—otherwise, we'll both be sitting ducks. Get your-

self refueled, then that will make two of us against three."

Then McCoy, before he went outside to watch for his rescuer, did something that proved in later years to be very important, though his intention at the time was nothing more than to make a gesture. He drew a number of quick sketches on a page of his report book. One showed a recognizable Jacko ship, with a series of others behind it. Opposite this he drew a large Earth-type ship, with others behind it, rank on rank, file upon file, stretching away into the distance. Above and astride these he drew the figure of a giant space-suited figure wielding an axe, in the act of splitting open Jacko ships.

McCoy was a fighting man—one of the best—a man who would have found his way into the front rank of any war in any age. He would have been an ace with any sort of weapon. He was not much of a thinker. He did not wonder very much why the present war had come about, or how it would end. He simply fought. But he was a talented draftsman and the bold, firm, black vigorous strokes of the sketch simply shouted defiance.

He crawled over towards the

Jacko ship and laid the sketch down on the top of a flat rock. Then he turned to watch for his rescuer. It was not long before he saw a red flare against the black sky as the ship swung round the curve of the asteroid, braking hard. It circled a couple of times before it spotted the stranded ships, then began carefully to maneuver itself down alongside. McCoy kept well clear of the flaring jets as it settled jerkily on its tail. He saw the three extra fuel tanks and a couple of ammunition crates strapped externally amidships. He waved to the pilot, who was peering down at him from the nose. The pilot gestured to make haste.

He leaped upwards, grasped a projection, and undid the lashings. The tanks and crates floated gently downwards. He caught them before they touched ground and towed them out of range.

The moment he waved all clear, the pilot blasted off, and swooped away upwards into the darkness, trailing fire.

Though the fuel tanks were very bulky, they were not particularly difficult to carry. But when he began to pour the dangerous liquid into his ship's tanks, it flowed sluggishly in the negligible gravity of the

asteroid. He left the first tank to empty itself while he transported the ammunition inside and fed it into the power-loaders. The whole process of fueling and re-loading took him an hour. Then with a glance outside at the stranded Jacko he blasted off. As soon as he was clear of the asteroid and had space to maneuver, he switched on his radio and Radar-sweep.

"McCoy here," he called. "Refueled and re-armed—what's cooking?"

"Just me," the voice of the pilot who had rescued him replied laconically. "I'm playing hide and seek round this surplus building material with three of the b—on my tail. Like to join?"

"Delighted," McCoy said. He saw four ships, quite large in the Radar, gliding swiftly here and there among the moving boulders. He swept round to come up on the tail of the three Jackoes. As he slid out behind a screen of rock he saw the single Earth ship fire at a Jacko. The Jacko split open and exploded a moment later. The Earth ship continued round in a violent turn to bring its guns on to the second of its pursuers. At the same instant McCoy swooped down on the

third. His approach was entirely unexpected. The Jacko took no evasive action. McCoy slid right up, fired carefully, and saw him explode.

He glanced up and down and around and saw the remaining Jacko pursuing the Earth ship. McCoy streaked off in pursuit. He fired a long range shot at the flank of the enemy at the instant its ray slashed out like a sword. The sort of impossible coincidence that could occasionally happen in space warfare occurred—the Earth ship detonated in a flaring explosion at the very instant McCoy's shells tore the Jacko to pieces.

McCoy's ship floated smoothly among the debris. Almost certainly the man who had just died had volunteered to bring that fuel. Now he was dead and McCoy was still alive and did not even know his name. He switched on his radio call. Almost immediately he got Commander Defala.

"McCoy—what about the scout I sent to refuel you?"

"He brought it," McCoy answered, "but right after that the Jackoes got him."

"What about them?"

"Between us we got them all," McCoy assured him. "Three for the price of one."

"I see—well, they've made a shambles of us here. A crowd of these Jackoes made a suicide attack on our cruisers—rammed and blew one up, damaged another. . . . My scouts are still engaged, half of them wiped out—the rest widely scattered. I can't do a thing for you. You must destroy that stranded Jacko and make your own way back—understood?"

He turned back to the asteroid where he had been stranded. He spiraled in, and automatically lined up his sights on the stubby red Jacko ship. As he looked down the sights McCoy knew his Jacko acquaintance must at this moment be staring up at him. The Jacko, he remembered, was one of the slickest pilots he had ever tussled with—he would recognize McCoy's ship as it slanted down. He would see the guns and know what was in store for him. What passed through a Jacko mind at such a moment, he wondered?

His fingers began to tighten on the triggers. . . . Then on a sudden impulse he swerved away. He cradled his guns and began to work on a course back to Base.

THE END

THE BRIDEY MURPHY WAY

What is more desirable than the assurance of re-incarnation? The image of Bridey Murphy is not destined to die soon, and it will surely be remembered by those who brave the spaceways. Thus it was that when Old Pop Winder heard of the House of the Second Life he was bound to go there and apply...

by PAUL BRANDTS

WHEN THE thought came to Old Pop Winder, it was so big it flowed through his body like rich, heady wine, making his senses giddy, his step light and springy. It was so big, so important, so unbelievably personal, that he at

once left his shack on Anthala Beach near the black, turgid, menacing waters of the Oberara, and within fifteen minutes had confided it to three bartenders on Alligator Street.

As he should perhaps have expected, they were short on



sympathy and totally devoid of understanding. The first one said gruffly, "You've been visiting the *impala* dens in New Frisco." The second said, in a style intended to be humorous, "Be careful, Pop. The Psycho Squad has opened an office in this neighborhood." The third merely grunted.

All of them looked uncomfortable at the nearness of Old Pop, and chose the first opportunity to get away.

He understood their attitude well enough. It was the same on Venus as on Earth. People might patronize the one who has been kicked to life's lowest level, the human derelict—they might even assist him, but they would not associate with him in a friendly relationship. It was as if they feared that a part of the misfortune of the luckless one might rub off on their own garments.

At other times he would have been sullenly resentful, but today he felt an emotion akin to pity. Men of little spirit and limited vision... It was his own fault for having approached them in the first place. But within him was a deep, aching need which must be satisfied. The thought that had come was too big for one man. He must find someone.

He—

The spacemen! It came like a burst of inspiration. The spacemen who debarked from the long, jet-black warships of the conquerors, who found their lodgings and most of their amusements on Empire Hill, and who seldom went to the meaner sections of the city. They were men who, in the unthinkable immense reaches of space, were accustomed to grappling with creatures and ideas that, to groundlubbers, were fantastic and inconceivable even to *impala*-stimulated imaginations. They would understand.

He began to think the day was one of his lucky ones when, after a fifteen minutes' walk, he turned up one of the plastic-paved approaches to Empire Hill and saw three of them walking directly toward him. They were moving very swiftly, three strong young men in blue honim suits, carrying themselves with an air of assurance that was almost insolent. This did not bother him in the least; he felt a little the same way inside.

They were not unfriendly. All smiled, and one of them gave him a greeting.

OLD POP placed himself partly in the path, and

threw out a conversational hook. "Have any of you ever been in a dicé game when you ran into a streak of bad luck? And you know the luck will change in the end, but the dice keep throwing up the wrong numbers, and your heart begins to burn inside you because you don't know if you can outlast it?" It would not do to blurt it out all at once; he must make conversation, easy and natural-like, get them to look at him, that is, at the man he was inside. "That's the way it's been with me, mostly—I mean real, and not in a game—since I struck Venus. I—"

They did not understand. The nearest one said cheerily, "Don't tell me about the breaks, Pop. I been through it myself;" and tossed him a golden quarter-credit that glittered as it spun through the air.

They began to move past him, not rudely and abruptly because there was a natural courtesy in all of them; but gradually, like a friendly leave-taking.

"I said it in a way to make you think I was asking for money. It was my fault. I don't have any use for money." He dropped the coin in the dirt. "Yesterday, maybe. I was only

sayin' that the breaks that have been bad for me, the evil that was in my life—that's all ended now. I found the way myself. It was a thought that came out of nowhere."

The one at the end, the tallest, was impatient. "Tell him we'll meet him at this same place tomorrow, Pooler, and hear the rest of it. You know how late we are. When I have a hot dish, I don't like to give it a chance to cool off."

"I found the solution for a man that's ailin' and penniless on Venus," said Old Pop. "I'm goin' to the House of the Second Life."

He had caught them as abruptly as if he had dropped a rope around their necks. They swung about and faced him directly. They stared as if he were a member of an alien species. The youngest one was looking at all their faces with wide-eyed curiosity, and he asked:

"What is it, Pooler? The House of the Second Life? I heard it mentioned before, and I asked questions but no one would answer. What is the House of the Second Life?"

The man called Pooler had a meditative face, with a dash of melancholy. He took his time about answering, his head

cocked to one side, composing his thoughts. "It's a visible, real, concrete representation of a dream—I should say, of the fondest dream men have held through all the ages. It's the light at the end of the rainbow, it's a symbol, a marsh-light, an illusion."

"All he's saying," said the tall one matter-of-factly, "is that the Venusians claim to have found a way to extend the length of life. They claim to have achieved something Earth explorers have not found in the farthest reaches of space. Only they never speak of it as an extension of the length of life; they call it a second life, as if the new one is in some way different from the old."

"Why don't we know if they can do as they claim?" pressed the young one, avid for knowledge. "Haven't we gone to the House of the Second Life to investigate? Why don't we know exactly what it is?"

"Because it's in the code governing the treatment of Subject Races," said the tall one, "that we do not interfere in the superstitions of the natives; that we allow them to carry on the more intimate features of their lives exactly as they have always done."

"Besides which, the Venusians—the young ones at least," said Pooler, "always speak of it in a tone of revulsion, as if in some way there's something obscene about it."

"I'll be the first Earthman who investigates it scientifically!" Old Pop had just discovered a new, altruistic justification for his original plan.

Pooler eyed him reflectively. "You don't mean that, Pop. Tell you what. Meet you in exactly this place same time tomorrow. I'll be prepared to make you a loan of several credits, and I'll see if I can wheedle the Old Man out of a pass to Earth for you. That'll fix you up. No more need to shock people with dangerous ideas." And they were off, with a swiftness of decision that left Old Pop breathless.

HE FOLLOWED after, but very slowly, with a sick and helpless feeling inside. There was in him such a profound need for these men that he was surprised they had not read it in his face. He wanted to call after them, but it was difficult to find suitable words; and by the time he had done so they were out of earshot.

He could not deny that their words had left him feeling a

little afraid. They were men with intelligence and boldness, and their opinions must be respected. At the same time there were many things about Venus which he knew and they did not. He felt just a touch of resentment at their cockiness of manner; and as a half-conscious expression of it, as soon as their distance-eating strides had carried them out of sight he turned down a street which bore no markings...at least none that were intelligible to earth minds.

There was something that he (as well as most of the underworld of the Earth-held cities of Venus) knew, which the spacemen did not. It was entirely possible to walk into the secret places of the natives, into their temples, even into the intimacies of their private chambers, and in perfect safety. There was a strangeness about the character of the Venusians, a cowardice maybe, or perhaps it was a conscious policy, dictated by a wise and all-pervasive race-intelligence; but as the underworld well knew (and it exploited this knowledge), it was totally impossible for a Venusian to perform an act of physical violence against an Earthman.

Today, as on other days, he was amused to see faces appear

momentarily at the windows of the small, squat, wooden houses, and disappear fearfully. They did not even wish to be seen by him. Even those who were walking on the street would scurry off into the side-ways and house-entrances when they saw him coming. If one was unlucky enough to come forth unexpectedly from a side street, and the encounter was unavoidable, he would walk with head averted and stay as far to the other side as possible. That of course was all right with Old Pop; he was perfectly willing to keep as great a distance as possible between himself and their lean, pallid, oily, scaly bodies.

Fish. It was his private nickname for them, and it was of course their biological origin. One could discover traces of it by peering very closely—in the long, twisted mouth, in the bulging, heavily-lidded green eyes, in the skin surface, in the complicated breathing apparatus. It was only at a distance that their carriage resembled that of men; when you looked closely the signs were unmistakable.

Only once had Old Pop been in close contact with a Venusian. On one of his jaunts through the forbidden areas, a native had startled him by com-

ing up and hissing, "Trouble?" It had taken him a little time to understand. "Trouble" had been one of the first words the Venusians, with their natural gift for languages, had picked up from the Earth-people; it stood for a thing they feared and, in a fashion that many races would have found humiliating, would take any pains to avoid. He had grunted something reassuring to the fellow, and gone on his way.

The incident, after he had thought it over carefully, had given him new confidence. He felt pleasure—as he sometimes admitted to himself sheepishly—in invading the quarters of the natives, and watching them break away in almost panicky obsequiousness before him. Made him feel better than they were.

Today there was an unusual energy in his body, or perhaps it was the problems in his mind that had conquered his grosser physical limitations. He kept recalling all the words of the spacemen, and in spite of himself kept returning to the idea that they had no real knowledge. How could they? How could anyone know unless he had seen for himself? He walked endlessly, thinking of these things, and was taken

quite by surprise when the houses fell away suddenly and he found himself shuffling along on a very level, red-pebbled plain.

THIS WAS a section near the city which was out of bounds, and which he had never before visited. The land here was a peninsula, a red tongue of stone licking hungrily out at the ocean. At the tip of the peninsula the land was elevated, dropping away hundreds of feet to the black rocks below; and at the highest point of the plateau was the building to which his steps had unconsciously guided him. He had seen it once from the air, a very long time ago, but he felt somehow he would have recognized it without foreknowledge of any sort—the House of the Second Life.

It was massive, sturdy, plain, very old and very ugly. It had many unexpected twists and convolutions, all of which were designed for the purpose of conforming to the activities going on within. The shape, although strange, had an inevitability about it, and he felt that it should have meaning for him, but somehow it did not. The very plainness, the lack of any attempt at architectural beauty,

was both repellent and fascinating at the same time.

There were men on the plain, all of them alone, heads bowed, shuffling along with the halting step of the aged. They walked toward their destination, a large door carved in the side of the House of the Second Life, not with eagerness but as ones who accept a penalty for misdeeds committed. Old Pop saw with a feeling of reassurance that other Venusians were leaving the building by a second door, even though they were so far away that he could make out no detail of their features.

He made his decision. He would walk through many of the doors in the House of the Second Life, and explore the chambers. Then he would return and describe to all who would listen, everything he had seen. He would not walk through the final door—that could wait for another day.

The journey across the plain was a long one, with many pauses, and all the while he kept his eyes carefully averted from the ocean on both sides. He was afraid of the black oceans of Venus, a sensible fear based upon tales he had heard of the ferocity of the teeming life within. He looked up with

a feeling of relief when finally the door loomed blackly before him, a large, simple rectangle cut out of the stone wall of the building.

He peered in cautiously, then entered boldly, head erect.

The room was characterless, almost void of furnishings, a waiting-room. There were Venusians here, all lined up against one of the walls, either standing or sitting on backless wooden benches. Somewhat reluctantly, mainly with the desire to allow his weary body a well-earned rest, Old Pop took his place on an unoccupied bench at the end of the line.

As he sat on the bench, he soon grew uneasy listening to the sound that came through the thin wall behind him. The sound was a hoarse, rasping one, like an intake of breath, followed by a loud splash, and it was often repeated. He understood the nature of it readily enough; there was a large water-tank very near. He had always been annoyed by the Venusian custom of keeping a reserve source of food supply in all their buildings and houses. Even the smallest home had its tiny, well-stocked tank.

HE HAD a sudden feeling that the old men in the

room shared his sense of discomfort; a number of them fell out of line and headed toward the entrance through which they had come. Then he realized that they had become conscious of his presence in the room, and were giving way before him. It distressed them to wait in the same line with an Earthman.

With due appreciation of the courtesy, he moved forward. The door was now very near, an archway shielded by threadbare purple drapes, and his path was impeded by one stubborn and immovable old man. This old native had his head turned partly to one side, and one large and bulging yellow eye appeared to be glaring at Old Pop in an almost insolent fashion. The old Earthman was annoyed and a trifle puzzled by this lone wolf who refused to defer to him like the others, until a gleam of light fell on the yellow eye and explained the situation.

The eye was false. The Venusian had lost his real eye in some sort of an accident many years before, and the substitute had yellowed with age. He could not even see Old Pop. His left eye was glass.

"Glass Eye," as if respond-

ing to a signal, went through the purple drapes, and the old Earthman, becoming impatient, pushed right in after him. This room was long and narrow with many doors, and had it not been for the bare and dungeon-like walls, would have had the look of a business office in an Earth building. An attendant was seated at a desk making entries in a register, and another was lounging lazily in a doorway.

The second man held Old Pop's eye, a big fellow stripped to the waist, who carried a contrivance like a lantern in one hand, and a whip-ray in the other. The whip-ray was an earth invention, a tube which emitted a very painful but not death-dealing ray, and which could be manipulated with uncanny accuracy. It was used to pacify and control domestic animals and even certain ferocious wild ones. Even as the Earthman watched, the sound of a loud splash came from the room behind the attendant, and he turned at once and disappeared. A few moments later there was a snort of pain and another splash, then silence.

Old Pop turned his attention to the man at the desk, a Venusian who was disposing of the

old men in line with swift, almost contemptuous efficiency. He had already arrived at "Glass Eye," and he made an entry in the register, brushed the gold credit placed before him into a drawer, and made a curt gesture with his hand. "Glass Eye," as if knowing what was expected of him, shuffled toward the farthest door in the room. Midway he hesitated timorously. The attendant at the desk, glancing around and, observing his indecision, barked something, and the old man wearily resumed his pilgrimage.

Old Pop stepped forward. The attendant turned bulging, heavily-lidded green eyes toward him for the first time, and at once exhibited signs of great distress. The red pen slipped nervously from his fingers and he looked this way and that, as if for succor. He was quiet for so long that the Earthman began to fear a language difficulty; but when he spoke it was in English, halting but fair.

"I do not know what it is you wish. Is it trouble?"

"I wouldn't say that, exactly. You got no call to be excited if a man drops in for a casual visit, just to look the place over."

The attendant nodded un-

easily. "You are free to walk about and look at whatever you wish."

"Well, naturally I'll do that. Naturally. Of course I might even get the idea to try something else. For all I know you've got a process here that might be of value to Earthmen. I might decide to try it."

The man's confusion was pitiable. "I don't know if what you see here—if you will understand. It is very important that you know what it is that you see. I cannot say it... it is a surrender of the body. It is not good that the body of an Earthman should be surrendered to Venusians." He went on for a time, trying very hard to explain, but there were many technical words and he lapsed often into Venusian. He used a Venusian word several times which meant, literally, a "going-back," a return to a previous point after a long journey; this puzzled Old Pop somewhat, and he could not see what that had to do with it.

Finally the old Earthman grew restless and impatient. "You let me walk through here and do as I like, or I will show you what trouble really means."

THE ATTENDANT drew back as if struck, and his

big eyes opened so wide that Old Pop was startled. Only once before had he seen a Venusian stare at Earth-people like that, with the heavy lids drawn entirely back from the eyes. It had been in the early days of the occupation, when the conquering Earthmen had paraded one of the captured Venusian leaders through the streets of the city in an open autoplane. The Venusian had stood there staring directly into the faces of the Earth-people, and Old Pop, who had been one of the crowd, had fancied that in his eyes was all the hatred of an enslaved race toward its masters, a hatred which they were forced to veil and suppress in their daily intercourse with them.

The attendant lidded his eyes almost instantly, to the Earthman's relief; but then, instead of giving immediate and fawning consent he hesitated for a long period. This man was either not as timid as the rest of his breed, or else his fear was dominated by an even more powerful emotion. After a time he came to a decision.

"I will take you to a room. There you may sit and think for half an hour or more. It is very important that you think

until everything that you see is clear. Come." He rose, bowed and pointed at the same time, and Old Pop preceded him obediently.

It was not the door "Glass Eye" had taken but another one that was opened, and the Earthman, after looking in timidly, entered with a slight feeling of pleasure.

This was not like the other rooms he had seen. It was comfortable, good-looking, even luxurious. Probably provided for the convenience of the building attendants, he judged, or possibly for the entertainment of visiting luminaries from among the natives. The lounges and chairs were plush-lined, deep and inviting. There was a transparent thermo-cabinet with fruit and drink inside. There were brightly colored pictures on some of the walls, as well as he could make out in the uncertain blue light.

The Venusian said, "You may sit here and think as long as you will—until everything is clear to you. Then, if you wish, you may return through the door by which you entered, and leave the House of the Second Life. Or, if you decide otherwise, you may go through the farther door." He bowed again

and disappeared, closing the door behind him.

Old Pop settled himself into the softness of the nearest lounge, and reached toward the thermo-cabinet. He had not the least idea what the fellow had meant by saying he should remain here and think for half an hour. If he thought for years, he would make no sense out of the garble of English and Venusian he had listened to. As for actually going through the second door, he had not entertained the idea for a moment. Although he would have admitted it to no one, he had lost his nerve. He was going to eat a little maybe, rest until he had recovered his strength, then walk right out and return to the place where he belonged.

AS HE was reaching toward the fruit, he was a little puzzled to note that the lounge was placed so that anyone sitting erect in it would be looking right at the wall behind, only a few feet away. He sat up. The light in the room grew brighter at the same instant that he looked directly at the wall—and a thrill of fear shot through him so intense that he sprang to his feet and uttered a half-suppressed scream.

There were moving-pictures

on the wall. No, it was not that, there were living things in the wall—the wall was transparent, a glass partition, and he was looking into the chamber beyond. A black mistiness undulated gracefully through all its reaches, and he knew it was filled with water, black ocean water. The water was inhabited. They had long, thick bodies, long as the bodies of the Venusians, with stunted appendages at the tail and just above the middle. They were clustered up to the wall, as if he were as much an object of curiosity to them as they to him. Wrinkled faces against the glass, eyes staring...it was the eyes that transfixed his attention.

Very wide-open, green and bulging. In them was a world of hatred, hatred that had been buried deeply and painfully within, suppressed for so long that it had become roaring, savage and unbelievably intense—the hatred of ones who had suffered for endless years, who had not yet found the way to inflict revenge on the authors of their suffering, who were waiting, waiting.... His speculations caused his body to tremble and he turned away.

He wondered somewhat irrelevantly about the nature of the strange light that allowed

him to peer so readily through the depths of black ocean water, and he turned to look again, but this time into the recesses of the chamber. There were circles of black shadow at one place and another, like openings. As he watched there was a sudden disturbance at one of the openings and something came out. It was one of the fish-things. It moved its head this way and that, and swam about curiously.

Presently it spied the group clustered before the glass partition, and came up inquisitively. Its body was like that of the others, but there was a strangeness about the eyes. They did not match. One was wide-open, green and staring, the other yellow, dull and lustreless.

Suddenly Old Pop realized. The fish-thing had only one eye. The left eye was glass.

He was seized in that instant with a panic as blind and unreasoning as that of the mindless animal-things of the Barian jungles. It was not that he understood clearly everything he had seen: he connected the fish-things with the old Venusians he had seen entering the House, and the phrase the native had used, a "going-back," had taken on new meaning. But

the fear that paralyzed him was that perhaps he had been lured into this room, that they were trying to trap him here, and soon the glass partition would be removed and the fish-creatures would flood through. His mind knew only one idea—he must get away. In his first hasty movement he stumbled, fell to the floor, and was appalled for an instant by the fear that his body would not respond to the direction of his senses. Finally he managed to right himself, and in that instant the light dimmed.

It was at the very agonizing peak of his terror that he discovered a door in front of him, opened it and plunged through. He heard it click shut behind him.

HIS FEELING of relief gave way to a vague sense of puzzlement. There was something wrong here. He did not see the desk of the attendant, or the other familiar things. Perhaps it was because the lights were out. No, he could see a little here and there—strange streamers of white light flickered weirdly and dizzily about. There was a long wooden platform in the center. Outside of this there was nothing.

This was a different room. He had come through the wrong door.

As a kind of reaction to his panic, a semblance of reason returned. This room did not look like a prison. They were not trying to cage him here. He must be cool and find a way out. There was another door, not very far away. He went over and tried it, but it was locked. He was only half conscious of the fact that in his passage across the room one of the queer ribbons of light had passed over his shoulders caressingly, and touched the bareness of his wrist. He retraced his steps to the first door.

There was only one course remaining for him, even though an unpleasant one. He would have to return as he had come, through the room with the glass wall and the fish-things, and thence to the outside. As soon as he had reconciled himself to the unwelcome idea, he tried the door—and experienced a recurrence of his panic when, on his first attempt, it proved stubborn and unyielding. He tried again, exerting additional pressure, forced it open for the space of several inches...held it there. Then, under the control of a power he did not un-

derstand, he allowed the door to shut again.

A something in the room was beginning to dominate his mind, or rather to lull it to sleep, and at the same time to attract his body. What was it?

With an intense effort, he groped for the solution, and found it. The streamer of light. In the moment it had touched him a dull pain had passed through all the parts of his body, and something besides—a stimulant?—no, that was far too weak a word. It was a new and enormously gladdening sense of vitality, a vitality such as human beings could only have known in the days when the race was young—a new strength, a new keenness to his senses, an unbelievable *aliveness*. And it was real, so real he felt like throwing his head back and shouting in pure exultation.

At the same time the power of his mind was diminishing, although he was quite unaware of the fact. He was very curious about the dancing, tantalizing ribbons of light. He wondered whether, if he touched them again, the effect would be the same. Of course there might be danger, but in the glory of his new-found vigor he

felt himself the master of anything that came before him. He stepped forward, watching as the whiteness flickered over his hands and arms, experiencing once more the all-pervasive pain followed by the joyous after-effect. He continued forward, content now to be wholly a slave of the queer power that inhabited the room.

He felt somehow that he had been instinctively aware of the existence of this room through all his life, and his coming to it was the acceptance of an inevitable destiny. He knew exactly what he must do. The wooden platform in the middle of the room had obviously been built to accommodate the proportions of a body. He stretched out upon it full-length. As soon as he had done so metal bands clamped over his legs and arms.

He was conscious of a momentary feeling of rebellion, but it died quickly. He was now in the very heart of the evil, dancing ribbons, and all other sensation became meaningless in their indescribable embrace. There was agony in it, agony so intense it threatened to tear him apart, and a triumphant, inexpressible, savage bliss.

AN UNMEASURED period of time elapsed. The metal clamps fell from his limbs, and the streamers of light danced away to the ceiling. He rose and prowled about the room.

Changes had taken place on the surface of his body, but he was quite unconscious of them. He was all body now; physically he still bore a certain resemblance to Old Pop Winder, but in his instincts and desires, in the alertness of his senses and in the lithe, fearful power of his body, he was an animal.

He had not forgotten the room with the desk and the two attendants; in fact he had vivid pictorial recollections of it and the other scenes outside. He knew his route of escape, but he was in no hurry. He was curious about the strangenesses of this room, and desired to investigate. He came upon something he had not seen before, a circular panel in the wall; even as he watched, it opened slowly inward, a door operated by an automatic device.

He looked inside. There was nothing but vacancy, and another circular door at a distance of only a few feet. It was a connecting chamber, a lock of some sort.

He had a slight premonition

and fear of being trapped, but in the confidence of his new-found strength, he felt superior to all obstacles. There was an additional incentive; this connecting chamber, he sensed, was a continuation in some way of the process he had undergone on the platform, under the streamers of light. He stepped inside. The circular door closed behind him, and at the same instant black water began to pour in from vents at both sides of the room.

He did not like this. He hated water. He filled large, powerful lungs with air, and tried to open the round door behind him; but there was no knob or other break in the surface on which he could obtain a grip.

The chamber filled quickly, and when the second circular panel opened it was already almost full. A dull blue light emanated from this new opening, and an impulse came to him. He had always been able to swim. Perhaps he could swim to the surface of the water, where the light was coming from, and in this way make his escape. With a sudden vigorous movement of arms and legs he plunged through the opening; instantly as he was aware of living things in the water.

He still felt no fear, but he would not be able to hold his breath much longer. He swam powerfully upward.

IN A ROOM above, the Venusian attendant was just coming to the head of a flight of stairs. In the same chamber was the other native.

As soon as he heard the approaching footsteps, he turned. "In the west end of the tank—if you will look, you will see for yourself!" he hissed quickly. "So many of them! I do not know what I should do!"

The first Venusian manipulated the lantern until he was able to see clearly the cause of the other's distress. There was a great disturbance in just the area in the tank illuminated by the lantern's rays, a threshing of the waters, a flurry as of strong bodies darting about and lashing forward in tremendous underwater combat. Then, after a period, there was quiet once more.

He turned, and for just an instant the heavy lids were raised, so that the eyes were wide-open and staring. Then they were lowered again.

"You need do nothing. Very soon there will be no more trouble."

THE END

ETERNAL ADAM

Author of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, etc.

Biographers and students of the immortal Jules Verne have declared Eternal Adam to be the author's final word on this world and its future. For it turned out to be the very last story his talented hand was to write. Shortly after the ink had dried on the closing lines, Verne went to his grave in March, 1905. Never before translated, it is unique for having a farther vision than any of his previous writings. For just this once, facing his own death, he dared to look into the farthest future, beyond the last horizon. Based upon theories of geology and evolution current in his days, it retains a sweep and imaginative challenge particularly applicable to these atom-haunted times. Willis T. Bradley, who translated the new Ace Book edition of JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH, expresses the opinion that ETERNAL ADAM may some day be counted as Verne's masterpiece. SATURN is proud to present ETERNAL ADAM for the first time in the English language to a science-fiction audience.

by JULES VERNE

Translated by Willis T. Bradley

THE ZARTOG SOFR-AISR—that is, the learned Doctor Sofr, youngest member of the hundred-and-first generation of his lineage—was making his way at a comfortable pace along the chief street in Basidra, capital of the *Hars-Iten-Schu*, the Empire (as we should call it) of the Four seas. These four seas, the *Tubelone*, or Northern, the *Ehone*, or Southern, the *Spone*, or Eastern, and the *Merone*, or Western, bounded the vast, irregularly shaped continent,



the limits of which (to reckon in terms known to my reader) reached, in longitude, as far as the fortieth degree east and the seventieth degree west, and, in latitude, as far as the fifty-fourth parallel north and the fifty-fifth parallel south. The extent of none of these seas could be guessed, even roughly, since each merged with each, and a navigator putting out from any one of the four coasts, and sailing always in a straight line, must gain the diametrically opposite coast. For, over the entire surface of the globe, save for one useless islet in the *Merone-Schu*, there existed no other land than that of the *Hars-Iten-Schu*.

Sofr was walking very slowly, first of all because the day was warm: they were entering the hot season, and at Basidra, situated on the shore of the *Spone-Schu*, or Eastern Sea, less than twenty degrees north of the equator, a fierce heat fell from the sun, then approaching its zenith.

But, even more than his weariness in that high heat, the very burden of his thoughts was slowing the steps of Sofr, the scholarly *Zartog*. While absent-mindedly moping his forehead, he was turn-

ing over in his mind what had been said at the meeting that had just been held, during which so many gifted speakers (among whom, to his honor, he had himself numbered) had hailed the hundred-and-ninety-fifth year of the Empire.

Some, for topic, had chosen history, not only that of the Empire, but the entire history, indeed, of mankind. They had told again the story of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu*, the Land of the Four Seas originally divided among uncounted savage peoples who lived in wild loneliness, having almost no knowledge of each other. Back to those folk were traced the most ancient traditions. Of still earlier things, nothing was known. True, the natural sciences were now beginning to make out some light, hardly more than a feeble glimmer, in the baffling darkness of those earlier times. But even so, by their very remoteness, they shunned truly historical study. True history could first take root only in a dim memory of those scattered ancient clans.

During more than eight thousand years, by degrees more fully told and more sharp in detail, the story of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu* was

nothing but a succession of strife and warfare, first between man and man, then between family and family, and finally between tribe and tribe—every living being, every group, small or large, having, in the course of the ages, no other goal than to prove its strength against its rivals, and striving, with diverse and often contrary success, to bring them under its own laws.

On this side of that span of eight thousand years, men's memories became a little keener. At the outset of the second of the four periods into which the annals of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu* were commonly divided, legend began to deserve more justly the name of history. But still, whether history or legend, the recitals seldom varied: they told always of bloodshed and butchery—no longer, it is true, of tribe by tribe, but from then on of people by people. So, all in all, this second period was not much different from the first.

And it was much the same thing with the third, brought to a close just short of two hundred years ago, having lasted through nearly six centuries. It differed only in that it was more brutal, a period during which, gathered into

endless armies, and fired with endless fury, men had drenched the earth with their blood.

THE FACT was that a little less than eight centuries previous to the day when the *Zartog* Sofr was strolling along the chief street in Basidra, mankind had felt itself ripe for a vast and decisive effort. By that time, brute force having already fulfilled a part of its necessary task, and the weak having bent before the strong, the men of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu* formed three distinct and fairly matched nations, within each of which the passing of time had softened the differences between the winners and the losers of former days. It was about then that one of those nations had undertaken to subdue its neighbors. The men who dwelt in the middle of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu*, the *Andarti-Ha-Sammgor*, or Men with Bronze Faces, strove ruthlessly to enlarge their frontiers, within which their fiery and fertile people were being squeezed. In succession, and at the cost of hundred-year wars, they had conquered the *Andarti-Mahart-Horis*, the Men of the Snow Country, who lived in

the land to the south, and the *Andarti-Mitra-Psul*, the Men of the Fixed Star, whose country lay to the north and west.

And nearly two hundred years had gone by since the last desperate uprising of those two peoples had been bloodily put down, and the land had known for the first time what it was to have peace. Now came the fourth historical period. When everyone had been drawn into a single Empire, with everyone subject to the law of Basidra, there followed a gradual blending of the three races. No longer did anyone speak of Men with Bronze Faces, or Men of the Snow Country, or Men of the Fixed Star. The land now held a single people, the *Andarti-Iten-Schu*, the Men of the Four Seas.

At the present moment, of course, after two centuries of peace, a fifth period was perhaps in the making. Rumors were afloat that furtive trouble-makers were at work. Certain thinkers had arisen with ideas calculated to reawaken memories of things long forgotten. The old feeling for race was being brought to life, but given a new character by new words. There was much talk of *throw-backs*, *blood-ties*,

racism, and so forth—all terms of fresh coinage, which, since they answered a need, had promptly been accepted. Depending upon what men had in common, whether bodily likeness, agreement of the mind, shared interests, or simply the accident of living together in the same climate, they were forming groups that little by little were gaining in membership and beginning to show signs of restlessness.

What might be the drift of this new trend? Was the Empire to be torn apart so soon after its birth? Was the *Mahart-Iten-Schu* to be split, as in the old days, into a great number of nations? Or must it again have recourse to the dreadful slaughter that for so many thousands of years had turned this land into a charnel house?

WITH A shake of his head, Sofr rejected such thoughts. Neither he nor other men knew anything of the future. Why, then, grieve in advance over what might never happen? Besides, this was no day to dwell upon grim forebodings. This was a day for joy, when all should give thanks for the greatness and goodness of Mogar-Si, Twelfth

Emperor of the *Hars-Iten-Schu*, whose staff of office was guiding his people toward a high destiny.

For a *Zartog*, more than for most, there was much reason to take the cheerful view. After the historians had done reciting the chronicles of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu*, a half dozen scientists had taken the floor. Each had given a summary of human knowledge in his own special field, and had stressed how far mankind had been brought by centuries of effort. And surely, if the first speakers, in retracing the slow, winding road by which man had made his escape from his animal state, had touched upon some shameful matters, the later speakers had fed in full measure the lawful pride of their hearers.

Yes, most truly, it was a wonderful thing to put man as he once had been—when first he came, naked and unarmed, upon earth—alongside of what he was today. Down through the ages, despite his quarrels and his murderous feuds, not for an instant had he broken off his struggle against nature, and ceaselessly had he enlarged his area of conquest. Two hundred years ago he had been still comparatively crawl-

ing; but then he had found his feet, and his triumphal march had begun. The power of his leaders, the soundness of his laws, and the resulting worldwide peace had given a remarkable push to science. No longer relying almost solely upon the strength of his body, man had learned to win with his mind; he had summoned councils, instead of wasting himself in senseless wars. Thus, in the course of the last two centuries, he had moved ever more rapidly through the realm of knowledge toward the day when he should hold the physical world in bondage.

As Sofr followed the long street in Basidra under the scorching sun, his mind swiftly sketched the chart of this fulfillment.

First of all, back somewhere in the Age of Darkness, man had hit upon the art of writing, with the object of fixing and transmitting his thoughts; next—and this was more than five hundred years ago—he had found the means of spreading the written word by way of any number of copies, all struck from a single plate. From this invention, really, flowed all the others. Thanks to it, minds were stirred and broadened, every man's knowl-

edge was increased by that of his neighbor, and the number of new findings, both theoretical and practical, could no longer be counted.

Man had dug deep into the earth and was drawing out coal, that great source of heat.

He had set free the latent energy of water, and now steam was pulling heavy trains on ribbons of steel and was giving motion to all kinds of powerful, delicate, precise machines; with these machines man could weave vegetable fibers into cloth and work his will on metals, marble, and granite. In a less applied field, or at least less directly applied, he was gradually solving the riddle of numbers and exploring the infinite range of mathematical truth. With this tool he had taken the measure of the heavens. He now knew that the sun was only a star gravitating through space, obedient to rigorous laws, sweeping a train of seven planets along its flaming orbit. He knew the art of combining certain crude substances in a way to form new substances having nothing in common with the old, and of separating certain other substances into their simple components. He was submitting sound, heat, and light to anal-

ysis and was beginning to determine the nature and laws of each. Fifty years ago he had learned how to produce the force so terribly active in thunder and lightning, and at once he had made it his slave: already this mysterious agent was carrying written messages over immeasurable distances; tomorrow it should carry sound; day after tomorrow, no doubt, light. Yes, man was great—greater than the immense universe that one day, and soon, he should govern as a master!

BUT EVEN then, if the whole truth were to be grasped, this final problem would have to be resolved: Who was man, this master of the world? Whence came he? Toward what unknown goal was his unflagging effort driving him?

This was exactly the vast problem that the *Zartog* Sofr had discussed near the close of the ceremonial meeting. To be sure, he had only skimmed the surface, for such a problem was at present insoluble, and doubtless it would remain so for a long time to come. The solution of some related problems, however, would help clear up the mystery. And had

not the *Zartog* Sofr been the one to make the most promising advance when, after having systematized and codified the patient observations of earlier investigators and his own personal findings, he had come out with his law of the evolution of living substance—a law that was everywhere accepted and no longer met with a single opponent?

His theory stood upon a threefold foundation.

First of all, upon the earth sciences, which, born on the day when digging in the interior of the earth began, had progressed along with the development of mining operations. The crust of the globe had been so thoroughly studied that its age could be unhesitatingly fixed at four hundred million years, and that of the *Mahart-Iten-Schu*, in its present form, at twenty thousand years. At an earlier period this continent had been sleeping under the waters of the sea, as witness the thick bed of marine clay that uninterruptedly covered the underlying beds of rock. By what mechanism had it been thrust up above the waves? Perhaps by the contracting of the globe as it cooled. But, however that might be, the emersion of the

Mahart-Iten-Schu must be considered a certainty.

The life sciences had furnished Sofr with the two other foundations of his system. By proving the close kinship of all plants and the equally close kinship of all animals, Sofr had gone farther: he had discovered evidence that nearly all existing vegetable life had descended directly from an ancestral marine plant, and that nearly all land or aerial animals came from ancient marine animals. By a slow but continuous evolution, the animals had adapted themselves little by little to living conditions at first close to, but afterwards more remote from, those known to their forbears; and so they had fathered most of the present species of animals and birds.

Unhappily, this ingenious theory was not flawless. That most living things, whether of the animal or the vegetable order, had descended from marine ancestors seemed not to be denied; but the same could not be said of all, for there did exist a number of plants and animals seemingly unrelated to any known aquatic species. Though they might be explained as freaks, here was one

of the two weak points in the system.

Man—and Sofr did not pretend otherwise—was the other weak point. There was no bringing together of man and animal. Of course, the basic essential functions, such as respiration, digestive processes, and locomotion, were the same; but there was a gulf between the physical development of the two orders that could not be crossed: a gulf between the number, disposition, and capacity of organs. Whereas, by a chain with only a few links missing, the great majority of animals could be joined with progenitors that had come from the sea, such a linkage for man was not to be found. Hence, to make the theory of evolution complete, it was necessary to conceive, without a shred of evidence, of a hypothetical stock common to both mankind and the denizens of the sea. And nothing, absolutely nothing, indicated that such a stock had ever existed.

AT ONE time, Sofr had hoped to find evidence under the soil that would be favorable to his thesis. At his urging, and under his direction, excavations had been car-

ried on for a long period of years, only to turn up results exactly opposite to those expected by their promoter.

After having passed through a thin skin of humus formed by the rotting of plants and animals similar or comparable to those seen every day, his diggers had got to the thick bed of marine clay, wherein the vestiges of former life were of a different kind. In the clay had been found no more of the existing flora or fauna, but instead a vast accumulation of fossils that were exclusively marine, with congeners still living, for the most part, in the oceans surrounding the *Mahart-Iten-Schu*.

What else must be concluded, if not that the scientists had been right in teaching that the continent had formerly served as part of the floor of those same oceans, and that Sofr had not been wrong, consequently, in affirming the marine origin of contemporary animals and plants?

But unfortunately for the attempt to fit man into the system, still another finding had been made. Scattered throughout the humus, and down into the topmost portion of the clay deposit, innumer-

able human bones had been brought to light. There was nothing exceptional in the structure of these fragments of skeletons, and Sofr had long since given up hope of finding among them intermediary types that might prove his theory: these bones were the bones of men, no more, no less.

At the same time, something totally unexpected had been confirmed. Reaching back to a certain age, which could be roughly put at two or three thousand years, the older the bones, the smaller the skulls uncovered. But, inconsistently, beyond this period the progression was reversed. From that point on, the further the retreat into the past, the greater the capacity of the skulls, and, by implication, the size of the brains that they had contained. The largest of all, in fact, had been found among the remains, few though they were, in the surface of the bed of clay. Careful examination of these venerable remains had left no doubt that the men living in that distant epoch had already acquired a growth of brain very much greater than that of their successors—including even the contemporaries of the *Zartog* Sofr. Clearly, then, there had been a

backward movement for a hundred and seventy centuries, followed by a new advance.

Troubled by these strange facts, Sofr had pushed on with his searchings. In many places he had had the bed of clay probed to its bottom, and its depth was such that, by the most conservative estimate, its deposit had required not less than fifteen to twenty thousand years. Below it came the surprising discovery of faint remains of an ancient layer of humus, and finally, beneath the humus, solid rock of a nature that varied with the site of the digging.

But the crowning astonishment was the uncovering of some vestiges, incontestably human in origin, buried at these mysterious depths. They included not only portions of the bones of men, but also fragments of weapons or tools, bits of pottery, scraps of writing carved in an unknown tongue, and hard stone objects, artfully sculptured. Considering the uniform quality of these artifacts, it could only be supposed that some forty thousand years ago—that is, twenty thousand years before the coming (none knew whence or how) of the first members of the present race—another

race had dwelt in these same places and had reached a highly advanced degree of civilization.

SUCH WAS, in fact, the conclusion generally admitted. Still, there was at least one who dissented.

The dissenter was none other than Sofr himself. To admit that other men, separated from those who came after by a gap of twenty thousand years, had first populated the earth was, in his opinion, sheer folly. For, in that event, how to account for their abrupt disappearance and the equally abrupt appearance of their descendents so long afterward, with no discoverable link between the two? Rather than entertain so absurd a hypothesis, far better wait for more data. Just because these odd findings had failed to explain something, it was not necessary to conclude that it was inexplicable. One day the answer would come. Until then, it was wiser to take no sides, and for the time being to hold to principles that completely met the requirements of sound reason. They could be summed up as follows:

Planetary life is divided into two phases: pre-human and

human. In the first phase, the Earth being in a state of continuous change, it is for this very reason uninhabitable and uninhabited. In the second, the crust of the globe has reached a degree of cohesion affording stability. And given this stability at last, life at once appears. It begins in its simplest forms and moves always toward the more complex, finally producing man, its most perfect expression. And no sooner does man come to Earth than he immediately sets out to seek his own improvement. Slowly, proudly, he is marching toward his end, which is complete understanding and absolute domination of the universe.

CARRIED AWAY by the fever of his stubborn belief, Sofr had gone past his house. He turned back with an impatient scowl.

"What would they have me do!" he muttered. "Admit that men forty thousand years ago enjoyed a civilization like our own, and perhaps a better one? Admit that their wisdom and their skill and goods could then vanish, leaving not the slightest trace? Wipe those people out so completely that their descendents should be

forced to begin the task once more at the bottom, thinking themselves pioneers in a world without men before their time? Why, that should be to gainsay the *future*, to cry out that *our* effort is in vain! That all human change is as aimless and as little secure as a bubble in the froth of the waves!"

Sofr halted in front of his house.

"No, no! Certainly not! Man is the *master* of things!" he whispered fiercely as he pushed open his door.

AFTER THE *Zartog* had rested for a few moments, he lunched with a good appetite, and then he lay down to take his daily nap. But the questions that had shaken him while on his way home continued to torment him, and they banished sleep.

Despite all his eagerness to establish an absolute uniformity in nature, his mind was too critical to miss the weakness of his system whenever he tackled the problem of the origin and development of man. To force facts to square with a hypothesis set up in advance is one way to convince others, but it is no way to convince oneself.

Had Sofr not been a schol-

ar, a very eminent *zartog*, and had he been instead a member of the illiterate class, he should have had no trouble. The people, indeed, wasted no time in profound speculation. They were content to shut their eyes and repeat the old legend that had been transmitted, since time forgotten, from father to son. Explaining one mystery by another mystery, they traced the origin of man back to the interference of what they called a Higher Will. One day, this unearthly Power had created out of nothing, and for no apparent reason, *Hedom* and *Hiva*, the first man and first woman, whose descendants had peopled this world. Thus everything was linked up very simply....

Much too simply! mused Sofr. When a man despairs of understanding something, it is all too easy to have a god intervene: this device makes it useless to seek solutions of the riddles of the universe, for it suppresses the problems as soon as they are stated.

If only there were a shred of support of the popular legend! But it rested upon nothing. It was only a tradition, born in times of ignorance, and thereafter handed down from one age to another. Why, even

the name *Hedom!* What was the source of this fantastic word, of outlandish sound, that seemed foreign to the tongue of the *Andarti-Iten-Schu*? Un-numbered scholars had worn themselves pale over just this little philological difficulty, and had found no satisfactory answer. Come, then! All this was idle stuff, unworthy of the attention of a *zartog*.

Sofr went down, in something of a temper, to his garden, for the hour had come when it was his custom to go there. By now there was less fire in the rays of the declining sun, and a soft breeze was beginning to blow in from the *Sponc-Schu*. The *zartog* wandered along the paths, shaded by trees whose shivering leaves were set to whispering by the on-shore wind, and little by little his nerves found again their habitual poise. He could shake off his absorbing thought, calmly enjoy the fresh air, and inspect with interest the fruits, which were the wealth of his gardens, and the flowers, their ornaments.

His idle steps brought him by chance back toward his house, and he paused at the edge of a deep excavation, around which were scattered a number of tools. Therein

would be laid, within a short time, the foundations of a new building that should double the size of his laboratory. But on this holiday the workmen had left their toil to take in the public games.

Sofr was absently sizing up the amount of work already done and of work still to be done, when, in the gloom of the excavation, a brilliant point caught his eye. Puzzled, he climbed down to the bottom of the hole and pulled a queer object out of the dirt three-quarters covering it.

Having climbed again into the light, the *Zartog* examined his find. It was some kind of case, with round ends, made of an unfamiliar metal, gray in color, granular in texture; its luster, dulled by the long time it had spent underground, gleamed only where it had been grazed by a workman's pick. A slit one-third of the way down from the top indicated that it was made of two parts, one fitting into the other. Sofr tried to open it.

At his first attempt, the metal, corroded by time, fell into dust, revealing a second object that it had contained.

Its material was as new to the *zartog* as the metal had been. It was a roll of large

sheets peppered with strange marks of a regularity suggesting written characters—but forming an unknown script, of a kind that Sofr had never seen, nor even anything like it.

Trembling with excitement, the *Zartog* hastened to lock himself in his laboratory, and, having spread out the precious document with care, he stood contemplating it.

Yes, it was some kind of handwriting; nothing could be more certain. But it was no less certain that the writing in no way resembled any that within historic times had been used anywhere on Earth.

WHENCE CAME this document? What message did it carry? These two questions now occupied Sofr's mind to the exclusion of all else.

To answer the first, he must be in a position to answer the second. The problem, then, was first of all to decipher the document and translate it—for it could be affirmed in advance that the language would be as unknown as the script.

Would this task prove impossible? The *Zartog* Sofr did not think so, and without delay he set eagerly to work.

That work took a long time—long, dull years, in fact. But

Sofr kept tirelessly at it. Undiscouraged, he pursued his methodical study of the mysterious script, advancing step by step toward the light. Finally came a day when he discovered a remote likeness between this ancient tongue and the most archaic dialect of the *Andarti-Iten-Schu*, and he held the key to the puzzle; the day when, at last, with much hesitation, he could put the message into the tongue of the Men of the Four Seas.

Now, when that day came, the *Zartog* Sofr-Ai-Sr made out what follows.

Rosario, May 24, 19—

I DATE in this fashion the beginning of my recital, although in reality it is being written long after this date and in surroundings very different. Considering my theme and motive, order, to my mind, is imperatively necessary, and that is why I am adopting the form of a "journal" written from day to day.

On May 24, then, begins the recital of the horrible events that I intend to report here for the instruction of those who will come after me—if ever again humanity can count upon any sort of future.

In what language shall I write? In English or Spanish, which I speak fluently? No! I shall write in the language of my own country: in French.

On this day, May 24, I was entertaining some friends in my villa near Rosario. Rosario is, or rather was, a Mexican city on the Pacific coast, a little south of the Gulf of California. Some ten years previously I had installed myself there in order to direct the working of a silver mine that was entirely my own property. My affairs had prospered astonishingly. I was a rich man—the word makes me laugh aloud today!—and was planning to return in a short time to France, the land of my birth.

My villa, among the most luxurious, was situated at the upper end of an extensive garden that sloped down towards the sea and ended abruptly in a perpendicular cliff more than a hundred meters high. Behind my villa, the terrain continued to rise, and by a winding road one could reach the summit of a mountain range having an altitude exceeding fifteen hundred meters. It was an agreeable drive and I frequently made the ascension in my automobile, a superb and

powerful double Phaeton, one of the best French makes.

It had been while living in Rosario with my son Jean, a handsome lad of twenty, that, upon the death of cousins distant in blood but dear to my heart, I had taken in their daughter Helene, left an orphan with no fortune. Since that time, five years had elapsed. My son Jean was now twenty-five; Helene, twenty. I secretly intended them for one another.

We were well served by my valet, Germain, Modeste Simonat, a most resourceful chauffeur, and two girls, Edith and Mary, daughters of my gardener, George Raleigh, and his wife Anna.

In the twilight of this day, May 24, eight of us were seated round my table in the soft light of electric lamps that drew their current from my own generators. In addition to the master of the house, his son, and his ward, there were five guests, of whom three were of the Anglo-Saxon race and two were natives of Mexico.

Doctor Bathurst was of the Anglo-Saxon group, and Doctor Moreno of the Mexican. The fact that the two were scientists in the widest sense

of the word did not prevent them from being rarely in agreement. But they were gallant gentlemen, and the best friends in the world.

The two other Anglo-Saxons were Williamson, proprietor of an important fishery in Rosario, and Rowling, an enterprising young man who raised early fruits and vegetables in the outskirts of the city and was in the way of reaping a substantial fortune.

As for the last guest, he was Senor Mendoza, President of the Rosario Tribunal, an estimable gentleman, a cultivated mind, of unquestioned integrity on the bench.

NOTHING WORTH recording occurred until we arrived at the end of the meal. I have forgotten what words we had exchanged up to this point. But, on the contrary, I well remember what was said over our cigars.

Not that our remarks had in themselves any particular importance; it was the brutal commentary on them, shortly to be made, that could not fail to give them a certain piquancy, and they have consequently stayed fresh in my memory.

We had entered into a discussion of the marvelous

achievements of man. At a certain point, Doctor Bathurst said:

"It is a fact that if Adam" (naturally, as an Anglo-Saxon he pronounced it *Eddem*) "and Eve" (he said *Eeve*, you understand) should return to earth, they'd be jolly well astonished!"

That was the origin of the discussion. Being a fervent Darwinist, a convinced partisan of natural selection, Moreno asked Bathurst in an ironic tone if he seriously believed in the legend of the Earthly Paradise. Bathurst answered that at least he believed in God, and that, since the existence of Adam and Eve is affirmed in the Bible, it was not his privilege to dispute it. Moreno replied that he believed in God at least as strongly as did his adversary, but that the first man and the first woman could very well be only myths—symbols, rather—and that consequently there was nothing impious in supposing the pair to represent the breath of life introduced by the Creator into the first cell from which all others had developed. Bathurst retorted that such an interpretation was specious, and that, as far as he was concerned, he held

it more flattering to be the direct work of the Lord than to have descended through the medium of more or less monkey-like primates.

The discussion, I felt, was about to grow heated; but it was suddenly dropped, for the two adversaries by chance found themselves in an area of agreement. (After all, that was how their arguments ordinarily ended.)

This time, reverting to their earlier theme, the two antagonists concurred in admiring the high culture attained by humanity, whatever had been its origin; and proudly they began to enumerate its conquests. Everything passed in review. Bathurst extolled chemistry, which was advanced to such a degree of perfection that it was likely to disappear by merging with physics to form a single science, primarily concerned with studying the energy inherent in matter. Moreno delivered the eulogy of medicine and surgery, thanks to which, he said, the nature of life processes had been probed to the core, with consequent discoveries that afforded hope, in the near future, of assuring the immortality of animal organisms. After which, the two

joined in praising the wonderful advances of astronomy. Were we not in communication, if not with the stars, at least with eight of the planets in the solar system?

WHEN THE two enthusiasts paused to catch their breath, my other guests and I seized the opportunity to put in a word in our turn, and we went into the vast field of practical inventions that had so profoundly modified our way of life. We toasted the rail-express and steamships that were still best adapted for the transport of heavy or bulky merchandise; the economical airplanes used by travelers who had time to spare; and the pneumatic or electro-ionic tubes, streaking through all continents and beneath the seas, indispensable for people in a hurry. We toasted the innumerable machines, increasingly ingenious, that could perform the work of hundreds of men. We toasted the new printing technique, and our ability to photograph not only light and color, but likewise sound, heat, and all the other waves vibrating in the ether. But above all we toasted electricity, the agent that was so versatile and con-

trollable, the essence and properties of which were now so perfectly understood that, dispensing with wires, we could use it to run all kinds of machines, navigate any vessel, marine, submarine, or aerial, and write, see, or speak—and at whatever distance we pleased.

In short, we joined in composing a genuine dithyramb to Progress, and I confess to contributing my share. We were agreed on the point that humanity had reached an intellectual peak unknown before our era, and that we were authorized to believe in our eventual victory over nature.

"And yet," said Judge Mendoza in his little piping voice, profiting by the moment of silence following this last conclusion, "I've heard it said that people long gone, of whom we can find few or no traces, enjoyed in their time a civilization equivalent to ours."

"And who were they?" we queried in one voice.

"Why...the Babylonians, for example."

There was a burst of laughter. To venture a comparison between the Babylonians and modern men!

"The Egyptians," continued Don Mendoza calmly.

More laughter.

"Take the people of Atlantis, too," went on the Judge. "They are legendary, but perhaps only because of our ignorance. Why not add that an infinity of other peoples, preceding the Atlanteans themselves, and quite unknown to us, may have succeeded in rising and prospering—only to die out completely!"

Since Don Mendoza was persistent in his paradox, the rest of us, in order not to offend him, pretended to take him seriously.

"Look here, my dear President," put in Moreno, using the tone one is careful to adopt when trying to make a child listen to reason, "you do not want to maintain, I imagine, that any of those ancient peoples could be compared to us? In the moral order, I admit, they might have raised themselves to an equal level of culture, but in the material order—"

"Why not?" objected Don Mendoza.

"Because," Bathurst hastened to explain, "the unique thing about our inventions is that they are immediately spread all over the earth: the disappearance of any one people, or even a great number of

peoples, as advanced as we are, would therefore leave intact the total accomplishment. For the present human effort to be lost, it would be necessary for all humanity to disappear at once. And is that, I ask you, an admissible possibility?"

EVEN WHILE he was speaking, causes and effects were continuing to succeed each other and interact throughout the universe, and in less than one minute after Doctor Bathurst's question, the resultant of certain of those causes and effects was going to justify only too well Mendoza's skepticism. But of course we were quite unsuspecting, and the discussion proceeded quietly, some of us leaning back in our chairs, others with elbows on the table, all turning sympathetic eyes toward Mendoza, who was overwhelmed, we supposed, by Bathurst's argument.

"Let me say first of all," said the Judge, unruffled, "that it is to be believed that the Earth in the old days had far fewer inhabitants than today, living in more isolated communities, so that one people could very well possess universal knowledge and keep it to themselves. And next, I see

nothing absurd in admitting the possibility that the entire surface of the globe might be convulsed all in one moment."

"Oh, come now!" we all cried together.

And it was at this precise instant that the cataclysm struck!

We were uttering that "Oh, come now!" when a fearful uproar arose. The ground trembled and sank under our feet. The villa rocked on its foundations.

Impelled by inexpressible terror, we collided and jostled as we rushed out into the garden.

And just as we crossed the threshold, the house collapsed in a heap, burying in its ruins Judge Mendoza and my valet Germain, who were slower than the rest. After a few seconds of quite natural shock, we were about to attempt their rescue when we were interrupted by Raleigh, my gardener, who came running up, followed by his wife, from his cottage at the lower end of the garden.

"The sea! The sea!" he was shouting at the top of his lungs.

I turned toward the coast and stood without moving, frozen with stupor. Not that I had any clear grasp of what

I was looking at in that twilight haze my only thought (and it hit me instantly, like a blow) was that the familiar face of things had changed. And my heart was chilled when I realized that a world I had considered essentially immutable had been strangely modified in a minute.

But I was not slow in recovering my presence of mind. Despite our wild boasting of a moment ago, the true superiority of man lies not in dominating or vanquishing nature. Rather, for the reflective man, it lies in comprehending, in containing, the immense universe in the microcosm of his mind. And for the man of action, it lies in preserving a cool head in the presence of rebellious matter, as if to say: "Destroy me if you will! But unnerve me—never!"

As soon as I had collected myself, I understood in what way the scene before my eyes differed from that to which I had grown accustomed. The simple fact was that the cliff had disappeared; my garden had fallen to the level of the sea, and the waves, having destroyed the gardener's house, were now foaming over my lowest flower-beds.

Since it was scarcely ad-

missible that the water had risen, it followed necessarily that the land had settled. It had fallen more than a hundred meters, the previous height of the cliff; but the descent must have been accomplished with a certain smoothness, for, after the initial jolt, we had hardly noticed it. And yet there was no other way to account for the relative calm of the ocean.

A brief examination convinced me not only that my hypothesis was correct, but that the descent had not stopped. The sea was continuing to gain, in fact, at a rate of perhaps two meters a second, or seven or eight kilometers an hour. As a consequence, given the distance between us and the first waves, if the speed of our descent remained uniform, we were going to be swallowed up in less than three minutes.

My decision had to be quick: "The auto!" I cried.

EVERYONE understood. We all ran to the garage, literally dragged out the car, and packed ourselves in without ceremony. Simonat, my chauffeur, slid under the wheel, started the motor, engaged the gears, and headed for the road

in fourth speed. Raleigh, who had darted ahead to open the gate, leaped on as we passed and crouched on the rear bumper.

Just in time! When the car turned into the main road, a wave sloshed under us, wetting the wheels up to the axels. But no matter, now we could laugh at the sea's pursuit! In spite of the excessive load, my automobile would carry us beyond its reach—unless the land should continue to sink indefinitely. In short, we had a clear field before us: two hours, at least, of ascent, and an available altitude of better than fifteen hundred meters.

But I soon realized that we could not yet cry victory. Although the first leap of the car had carried us twenty or so meters beyond the fringe of foam, it was in vain that Simonat opened the throttle wide; our lead did not increase. Of course, the weight of twelve people was slowing the speed of the vehicle. Whatever our speed, it was exactly equalled by that of the invading water, and the distance between us remained constant.

As soon as the others understood our disquieting predicament, they all (except Simonat, who was intent upon man-

aging the car) turned round to watch the road behind. There was nothing but water to be seen. No sooner did we pass over a stretch of road than it would disappear beneath the advancing sea. The water was now smooth; scarcely a ripple rode in to die on a beach that was ever new. It was a tranquil lake that was swelling, always swelling, at a steady rate... and nothing was so grim as the pursuit of that tranquil water. It almost seemed useless to flee before it; the water was mounting, implacably with us.

Keeping his eyes fixed on the road, Simonat said as we came to a turning:

"Here we are at the half-way mark. An hour's climb still ahead."

We shuddered—and why not! In an hour we were going to reach the summit, and then we should have to go down again, chased, then overtaken, regardless of our speed, by the masses of water that would tumble over us like an avalanche!

The hour passed with no change in our situation. The crest of the mountain rose just ahead. But then came a violent shock, and the vehicle gave a lurch that almost crashed it against the roadside bank. At

the same time, an enormous wave swelled behind us, rushed up the road, rose in a curve and broke against the auto. We were plowing through foam... were we at last to be engulfed?

No! The frothing water receded, while the car, with sudden life in its motor, took on renewed speed.

What could explain this unexpected acceleration? A cry from Anna told us: the poor woman had just discovered that her husband was no longer crouching on the rear bumper. Evidently the retreating wave had carried off the unfortunate man, and now the car, relieved of two hundred pounds, could make better time on the slope.

But suddenly it came to a dead stop.

"What's the matter?" I asked Simonat. "A breakdown?"

Even in our tragic circumstances, professional pride did not forget its rights; Simonat gave a shrug of disdain, intending me to understand that breakdowns were unknown to chauffeurs of his class. He silently pointed to the road ahead. The reason for our halt was then apparant.

Less than ten meters in front of us, the road was cut off. "Cut" is the right word: you

would have supposed it chopped by a giant cleaver. Beyond the sharp edge that abruptly terminated it was a void, a dark abyss, in the depths of which we could distinguish nothing.

We looked behind us, aghast, certain that our last hour had come. The ocean, which had pursued us as far as these heights, would now overtake us in a few seconds.

But, except for the unhappy Anna and her daughters, who were shaken by heart-breaking sobs, we all gave a shout. The water was no longer rising—or, more accurately speaking, the land had stopped sinking. Doubtless the shock that had nearly wrecked us had signified the end of the disturbance. The ocean, therefore, had stopped its advance, and in the gathering darkness we could see that its level stood nearly a hundred meters below where we were grouped about the auto which was still panting like an animal out of breath after a rapid race.

Could we succeed in getting out of this bad spot? We should not know until daylight. Till then we must wait. One after another we stretched out on the ground, and I believe that I fell asleep....

IN THE NIGHT

I HAVE been startled out of my sleep by a tremendous noise. What time is it? I do not know. But at least we are still plunged in the darkness of night.

The noise is issuing from the unknown abyss into which the road ahead has fallen. What is going on down there? I judge that masses of water are dashing violently together. Yes, that must be the answer, for the spray is raining on us.

But the quietness is gradually returning...complete silence once more. The sky shows a pale light.... Day is breaking....

May 25.

WHAT TORTURE worse than the slow revelation of our true predicament! A few moments ago we could make out only our immediate environment, but the circle has widened, ever widened, as if in desperation we were drawing aside curtain after curtain. And finally broad daylight destroys our last illusions.

Our situation is quite simple and can be summed up in a few words. We are on an island. We are hemmed round by the sea.

Only yesterday we would have been looking at a sea of mountain tops, several of them dominating the one on which we are standing those mountain tops have all disappeared, while, for reasons that will remain forever unknown, ours, though more humble, has been arrested in its descent; everywhere else spreads that boundless sheet of water. In every direction, nothing but the sea. We are occupying the only solid land within the immense circle of the horizon.

A glance is sufficient to acquaint us with the whole extent of the islet that, by a extraordinary stroke of luck, has given us refuge. For it is certainly small: a thousand meters long, at the most, and five hundred wide. On the north, west, and south sides, fairly easy slopes mount to its summit, about a hundred meters above the waves. But on the east, the islet ends in a cliff that falls vertically into the ocean.

We keep turning our eyes in that direction. There we should have the mountains, tier upon tier, and beyond them should extend all Mexico. What a transformation in one brief spring night! The mountains have vanished, and Mexico has

been engulfed! In their place is an infinite desert, the barren desert of the sea!

We look at each other in cold terror. Marooned without food or water on this narrow, naked rock, we are left with no hope at all. Bitter but resigned, we might as well lie on the ground and await the coming of death.

Aboard the Virginia, June 4.

WHAT HAPPENED during the next few days? I have retained no memory of them. It is to be supposed that I finally lost consciousness, and I came to only on board the ship that picked us up. Only then did I learn that we had remained ten whole days on the islet, and that two of our party, Williamson and Rowling, had died there of hunger and thirst. Of the fourteen people that my villa was sheltering at the moment of the cataclysm, only nine are left: my son Jean and ward Helene, my chauffeur Simonat, inconsolable over the loss of his machine, Anna Raleigh and her two daughters, Doctors Bathurst and Moreno, and finally myself.

The *Virginia*, the ship that has rescued us, is a hybrid

vessel, a sailer with auxiliary motors, or, if you will, a motor ship with auxiliary sails, engaged in the transport of merchandise. She is a fairly old ship, of about two thousand tons, seaworthy but slow. Captain Morris has twenty men under his command. He and the crew are English.

The *Virginia* left Melbourne under ballast a little over a month ago, bound for Rosario. No incident marked her crossing, except that on the eve of May 25 she encountered ground swells of a prodigious height but of a proportionate length that rendered them harmless.

Singular though they were, they could give the Captain no warning of the cataclysm that was occurring at the same time.

Therefore he had been highly astonished to find only the sea where he had expected to find Rosario and the Mexican coast.

Of that coast, only one islet remained. A boat from the *Virginia* had accosted the islet, on which eleven inanimate bodies were discovered.

Two were corpses; the nine others were taken aboard. And that is how we were saved.

Ashore—January or February.

AN INTERVAL of eight months separates the last lines of the preceding section from the present writing. I date this January or February, finding it impossible to be more precise, for I no longer have an exact notion of time.

These eight months cover the cruellest period of our ordeal, during which suffering ever-increasing hardship, we came to know the full extent of our misfortune.

After picking us up, the *Virginia* continued on her way east at full speed. When I came to myself, the islet on which we had nearly died was long since under the horizon. According to bearings taken in a cloudless sky, we were then sailing exactly where Mexico City should have been. But of Mexico City there remained no trace; nor, during my unconsciousness, had any of the central mountains been sighted; nor could we now discern any land whatever, as far as our view extended: in every direction there was only the infinity of the sea.

We could not help wondering if not the world, but we, had gone mad. Think of it! Mexico entirely swallowed up! We exchanged frightened glances and asked ourselves how

far the ravages of the terrible cataclysm had been felt....

The Captain was determined to know the answer. Changing his course, he headed north: even if Mexico no longer existed, it was unthinkable that the same could be true of the entire North American continent.

But it was the same! For twelve days we went north without meeting land. And we met none after putting about and sailing south for nearly a month. However fantastic the fact appeared, we were compelled to surrender to the evidence: both American continents had sunk under the waves!

Had we been rescued, then, only to know for a second time the agony of death? We truly had every right to think so. Not to mention provisions, which sooner or later must be exhausted, a pressing danger was threatening us: what should become of us when exhaustion of our fuel shut down our engines? That is why, on July 14, when we found ourselves close to the former site of Buenos Aires, Captain Morris stopped the engines and hoisted sail. That done, he assembled everyone on board the *Virginia*, crewmen and passen-

gers, and, having explained our situation in a few words, requested each of us to reflect upon it and to offer any solutions that occurred to us at a council to be held on the following day.

I do not know whether any of my companions in misfortune hit upon any more-or-less intelligent expedients. For my part, I was hesitating, I confess, being very uncertain of the best course to take, when a tempest arose in the night and decided the question: we had to run toward the west before a violent wind, at every instant on the point of foundering in the raging sea.

The hurricane lasted thirty-five days without a minute's interruption, not even any slackening of its force. We were beginning to give up hope of its ever ending, when, on August 19, fine weather returned as abruptly as it had deserted us more than a month previously. The only good the storm had done was to provide us with a quantity of fresh water. The Captain profited by the return of the sun to take an observation; his calculations gave him forty degrees north latitude and a hundred and fourteen degrees east

longitude. These were the coordinates of Peking!

So, then, we had passed over Polynesia, and perhaps Australia, quite unawares, and were now sailing over what had been the capital of an empire of four hundred million souls!

Had Asia, too, suffered the fate of the Americas?

We were soon convinced that it had. The *Virginia*, following a southwest course, reached the latitude of Tibet and the Himalayas. Here should have soared the highest peaks on the globe, but nowhere was anything emerging from the surface of the ocean.

It began to look as if no solid land, except the islet that had saved our lives, existed on earth—and that we were the only survivors of the cataclysm, the last inhabitants of a world buried in the shifting shroud of the sea!

If this were true, we should not be slow to perish in our turn. In spite of strict rationing, the provisions on board were by now running low, and in our predicament we must abandon all hope of renewing them. These seas were yielding us no fish whatever.

I WILL abridge my account of that frightening voyage. If I were to report it in detail, attempting to relive it day by day, the memory would drive me mad. For, however strange and terrible the events both before and since, and however dismal the prospects of the future (a future that I shall not witness), during that infernal voyage we knew the limit of human terror. That endless cruise on a sea without end! To expect every day to accost some coast, yet to find the term of our voyage ceaselessly deferred! To live crouching over maps upon which men had engraved sinuous shore lines, and to realize that nothing, absolutely nothing, was left of regions they had thought eternal! To tell ourselves that the earth had throbbled with innumerable living beings, that billions and billions of men and animals had pervaded its lands and flashed through the air, and that all at once everything was dead, that all lives had been extinguished together like a little flame in a gust of wind! To seek everywhere for our fellows, and to seek in vain! To acquire little by little the certitude that beyond our little company there existed

no living thing, and to become gradually conscious of loneliness in the middle of an unmerciful universe!

Have I found words capable of expressing our anguish? Probably not. In no language can there exist words adequate to cope with a situation without precedent.

After having reconnoitered the waters covering the Indian peninsula, we sailed northward again for ten days and next turned west. Then, with no change in our desperate situation, we passed over the chain of the Urals, now become submarine mountains, and entered what had been Europe. We turned southward and sailed as far as twenty degrees below the equator; and then, wearily abandoning our unrewarded search in that direction, we resumed a northerly course over an expanse of water that had drowned Africa, Spain, and the Pyrenees. By this time our very terror had turned into a stale numbness. We had been marking our course on the ship's charts, and as we advanced we would say: "Here was Moscow... Warsaw ... Berlin ... Vienna ... Rome ... Tunis ... Timbuctu ... Oran ... Madrid..." But, with increasing

unconcern, we found ourselves reciting these names without feeling.

And yet I, at least, had not exhausted my capacity to suffer. I knew so on the day—it was perhaps December 11—when Captain Morris said to me: "Here was Paris. . . ." At these words, I felt that my soul had been snatched from me. Let the entire universe be inundated, yes! But France—my France!—and Paris that was her symbol. . .

I heard a sob. I turned: Simonat, too, was weeping.

Four days later, having reached the latitude of Edinburgh, we turned back toward the southwest, seeking Ireland, and then set a course due east. The truth is, we were wandering at random, for there was no more reason to go in one direction than in any other. . . .

We passed over London, whose liquid tomb was saluted by the entire crew. Five days afterward, when in the neighborhood of Danzig, Captain Morris turned about and ordered a southwest course. The helmsman obeyed passively. What did it matter to him? Would it not be the same thing everywhere?

It was on the ninth day of pursuing this course that we ate our last morsels of biscuit.

As we were eyeing each other haggardly, Captain Morris suddenly ordered the engines started. Even now I ask myself what impulse he was obeying. The order was carried out: the speed of our ship was accelerated.

TWO DAYS later we were already suffering cruelly from hunger. Two more days, and almost everyone stubbornly refused to leave his berth; only the Captain, Simonat, a few crewmen, and I had the energy to carry on the management of the ship.

Next day—our fifth day of fasting—the number of volunteer crewmen was further decreased. In another twenty-four hours nobody would have the strength to remain on his feet.

By then we had been cruising for more than seven months. For more than seven months we had persisted in seeking a goal that evidently had no existence. And as I was reflecting that this was perhaps the eighth of January, I realized that the calendar had lost all meaning.

Now, it was on this day,

while I was at the wheel, straining to keep my feeble attention on the prescribed course, that I seemed to make out something in the west. Though certain that it was an illusion, I stared intently.

No, I had not been deceived.

I gave a wild shout and then, gripping the wheel, cried out: "Land ahead to star-board!"

What magical words! The dying were all immediately revived, and their emaciated forms crowded along the star-board rail.

"It is land, for a fact," said Captain Morris, after having studied what might have been a cloud rising on the horizon.

Within a half hour it was impossible to have the least doubt. Land it certainly was ~~that~~ we were meeting out in the middle of the Atlantic—after our failure to find any land where the former continents had been!

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, the details of the coast that was barring our way became clear, and we felt a rebirth of despair. For in truth this coast resembled no other, and none of us could recall ever having seen land as unlikely, as completely hostile to man, as this.

On all land inhabited before the disaster, green had been an abounding color. We could recall no coast so disinherited, no country so barren, that it could not support some shrubs, or tufts of gorse, or at least traces of lichen and moss. But here, nothing at all. We could distinguish only a high, blackish cliff, with a chaos of fallen rocks along its base. Here was most utter, most absolute desolation.

For two dreadful days we coasted along without discovering any break in that sheer cliff. But towards the evening of the second day we found an ample harbor, well sheltered from the winds of the open sea, at the head of which we dropped anchor.

Our first thought as soon as we landed in the ship's boats, was to collect food on the beach. There were turtles by the hundreds, and shellfish by the millions. Off the ledges we could see a fabulous quantity of crabs, lobsters, and crawfish, as well as innumerable fish. From all appearances, this teeming harbor would suffice, in default of other resources, to support us indefinitely.

When we were restored, we were able, by way of a cut in

the cliff, to reach the plateau, where we could look out over a broad expanse of country. The view from the water had not been deceptive: on all sides, in every direction, there were only arid rocks, covered with wrack and seaweed, mostly dried, without as much as a single blade of grass, nor any living thing, either on the ground or in the sky. Here and there, little lakes—pools, rather—glistened in the rays of the sun. But when we tried to slake our thirst, we found the water brackish.

We were not surprised, to tell the truth. The fact confirmed what we had suspected from the first: namely, that this unknown continent had been born yesterday, that it had emerged, all of a piece, from the depths of the sea. This explained its barrenness and its complete lack of terrestrial life. It explained, too, the thick bed of slime, uniformly spread, which, owing to evaporation, was beginning to crack and to be reduced to dust.

Our bearings, taken at noon on the following day, proved to be 17° 20' north latitude and 23° 55' west longitude. According to our map we were in the open sea at about the

latitude of Cape Verde. But now as far as we could see land was extending to the west and water to the east.

HOWEVER STERN and inhospitable was the territory upon which we had set foot, we were forced to be content with it. So the unloading of the *Virginia* was undertaken without delay. We dragged up to the plateau everything she carried, without discrimination. But first we had secured the vessel fast by head and stern with four anchors on a fifteen-fathom bottom. In this tranquil harbor she would be safe, and we ran no risk in leaving her to herself.

As soon as the unloading was finished, our new life began. In the first place, it was expedient—

AT THIS point in his translation, the *Zartog* Sofr had to break it off. He had come to the first gap in the recital (and one of great moment, probably, since there seemed a quantity of pages missing)—a gap followed by several others still more considerable, as far as could be judged. Evidently dampness had got to a great number of the outer sheets of the roll,

notwithstanding the protection of the metal case: there remained, indeed, only a few fragments of varying length, with a context forever destroyed. They succeeded each other in the following order.

HOW LONG has it been since we disembarked on this coast? I cannot say definitely. I asked Doctor Moreno, who has been keeping a calendar of the passing days. He said: "Six months...a few days...more or less." So he, too, confesses to have lost count.

Well, I saw it coming! In less than six months we have lost confidence in our reckoning of time. How very promising!

But our negligence, after all, is not very astonishing. We are devoting all our attention; all our activity, to the task of keeping alive. Feeding ourselves is a problem, the solution of which requires the entire day. What do we eat? Fish, when we find any—but they grow more difficult to find every day, for our incessant pursuit is scaring them off. We eat turtle eggs, too, and certain edible seaweeds. By evening we are fed, but ex-

hausted, and we think only of sleep.

Tents have been improvised from the *Virginia's* sails. I suppose that before long we must construct more substantial shelters.

Sometimes we shoot a bird. The atmosphere is not so deserted as we had first thought; ten or twelve familiar species are represented on this new continent. These are exclusively birds capable of long flight: swallows, albatrosses, cormorants, and a number of others. Apparently they do not find enough to eat in this barren land, for they wheel ceaselessly over our encampment, waiting for leavings from our miserable table. Sometimes we pick up one that has died of hunger, thus sparing our powder and shot.

Happily, there is some chance that our situation will not always remain so unpleasant. We discovered a sack of wheat in the *Virginia's* hold, and we have sown half of it. We shall be a lot better off when the grain is ripe. But will it germinate? The ground is covered with a thick bed of alluvium, sandy mud enriched by the decomposition of seaweed. However mediocre its quality, it is humus none the

less. When we landed, it was impregnated with salt; but since then diluvial rains have copiously washed the surface, and all the hollows are now filled with sweet water.

All the same, the alluvial bed is free of salt only to a very slight depth: the streams and rivers that are beginning to develop are all extremely brackish, proving that the subsoil is still saturated.

To sow half the wheat and keep the other half as a reserve, we nearly had to fight: part of the crew of the *Virginia* wanted to make bread of it at once. We were forced to—

...from the *Virginia*. The rats immediately scampered off into the interior, and we have not seen them again. We can only believe that they have found something to feed on. If so, the land, without our knowledge, must be yielding—

...two years, at least, that we have been here! The wheat has succeeded wonderfully; we have almost all the bread we want, and our fields are ever gaining in extent. But what a struggle against the birds! They have strangely multi-

plied, and all around our tillage—

IN SPITE of the deaths that I have related above, our little tribe has not diminished. On the contrary! My son and my ward have three children, and each of the three other families has as many. All the little rascals are radiant with health. It is as if the human species were possessed of a greater vigor, a more intense vitality, since it has been so reduced in number. But whatever the causes—

WE HAD been here for ten years, and we knew nothing of this continent. We were acquainted only with the area contained within a radius of a few kilometers around the place where we disembarked. It was Doctor Bathurst who made us feel ashamed of our apathy; at his instigation we refitted the *Virginia*—a task that required almost six months—and went on a voyage of exploration.

We returned only the day before yesterday. The voyage lasted longer than we had expected, but we were resolved that it should be complete.

We have circumnavigated our continent, which, not

counting the tiny islet, we have every reason to believe must be the only surviving land on the surface of the globe. Its shores appeared to be everywhere alike, that is to say, very harsh and wild.

Our tour was interrupted by several excursions into the interior: we hoped especially to find traces of the Azores and of Madeira, for these islands, because of their location in the Atlantic, ought to have formed a part of this new continent. We found not the slightest vestige of them. All that we have been able to establish is that the ground was convulsed and buried under a thick layer of lava on the sites of the islands, which obviously were destroyed by violent volcanic activity.

But if we did not discover what we were looking for, we did discover something we certainly were not looking for! Half buried in the lava, in the latitude of the Azores, we came upon evidence of human work—and not the work of the Azorians, our contemporaries of yesterday. There were remains of columns and pottery, of a kind we had never seen before. After examining them, Doctor Moreno expressed the opinion that those remains

must have survived from ancient Atlantis, and that the volcanic eruption had brought them to the surface.

Perhaps Doctor Moreno is right. If it ever existed, Atlantis would indeed have been located somewhere near the bearings of the new continent. Verification of the legend would reveal a singular thing: the development, in the same place, of three successive cultures not descending one from another.

Whatever the answer, I confess that the problem leaves me cold. We have enough to do with the present, without troubling ourselves about the past.

NOW THAT we have regained our home encampment, it strikes us that, compared with the rest of the country, ours seems a favored region. The reason is that the color green, formerly so abundant in nature, is here not entirely unknown, whereas it is completely absent from the rest of the continent. We had not noticed this fact up to now, but it is undeniable. Grasses, which did not exist when we first arrived, are now springing up quite plentifully around us. They belong, however, only to a small number

of the most common species, the seeds of which have doubtless been carried here by the birds.

It must not be concluded from what I have said that there is no vegetation except for the few species carried over from the old days. As a result of an amazing adaptation, there exists, on the contrary, a vegetation in a rudimentary or promissory state, at least, over all the continent.

The marine plants that covered it when it emerged from the sea died, for the most part, under the light of the sun. But a few persisted, in lakes, ponds, and pools that the heat progressively dried up. At the same time, rivers and streams were beginning to appear, temporarily quite suitable, in that the water was salty, to nourish the weeds and marsh grasses. When the surface, and then the depths, of the soil had been cleared of salt, and the water had turned fresh, most of the plants were destroyed.

A small number of them, however, were capable of adapting themselves to new living conditions, and have been flourishing almost as well in the fresh water as they had when it was salty. And the phenomenon has not stopped there:

some of the plants, endowed with still greater power of adaptation, having grown used to fresh water, are now growing used to fresh air, and, first up the river banks, and then moving inch by inch from one place to another, they have been creeping towards the interior.

We have witnessed this adaptation in the act, and we can attest that these plants are showing not only biochemical but also structural modification. Already a few stalks are rising, as if timidly, toward the sky. We can foresee that one day a varied flora will thus be created from common roots, and that a violent struggle may be waged between the new species and those descending from the old order of things brought in by us and the birds.

We are led to speculate that what is happening to the flora may also happen to the fauna. In the neighborhood of running water—

THE LAST few sheets contained intact the end of the manuscript.

I feel very old. Captain Morris is dead. Doctor Bathurst is about sixty-five; Doctor Moreno, sixty; I, sixty-eight. We three shall soon be done with

life. But first we shall accomplish our elected task and, in so far as it may lie in our power, come to the aid of future generations in the struggle awaiting them.

But will they see the light of day, those future generations?

I am tempted to say yes if I take into account only the multiplication of my kind.

Children are swarming all over the place, and in this healthful climate, in a country where wild beasts and most of the old diseases are unknown, longevity is common. Our colony has tripled in number.

On the other hand, I am tempted to say no if I consider the profound intellectual decay of my companions in misfortune.

It is ironic that our little group of castaways were well equipped to turn human knowledge to account: it included one particularly capable man of action—Captain Morris, now deceased; two men of better-than-average education—my son and myself; and two genuine scientists—Doctor Bathurst and Doctor Moreno. With such material, something could have been ac-

complished. But nothing has been accomplished. The preservation of our physical lives has from the very beginning been (and still is) our only care. As from the first, we devote our time to the search for food, and in the evening we sink exhausted into heavy sleep.

Alas! it is only too certain that humanity, of which we are the sole representatives, is on the road to rapid regression leading to brutehood. Among the sailors from the *Virginia*, men originally of no refinement, the signs of animality are more conspicuous; but my son and I have forgotten much of what we once knew, and Doctor Bathurst and Doctor Moreno themselves have let their minds lie fallow. Our intellectual life has withered away.

How fortunate it is that a good many years ago we managed the circumnavigation of this continent! Today we should not have the requisite courage. And moreover, Captain Morris, who commanded the expedition, is dead—and the *Virginia* dead, too, decayed beyond repair.

We all sleep on the ground, in all seasons.

For a long time there has been nothing left of the clothing that once covered us. We go about naked, like those we used to call savages.

To eat, to eat—that is our perpetual end, our exclusive preoccupation.

People of the future, born here, will never have known any other existence. Humanity will be reduced to illiterate adults (I have some before my eyes as I write) who cannot reckon, and can scarcely talk—and to sharp-toothed children who seem to be little more than insatiable stomachs.

I seem to see them, those men of the future, ignorant of articulate language, intelligence extinguished, bodies covered with coarse hair, wandering in this dreary desert....

On the threshold of death.

IT IS now almost fifteen years since the lines above were written. Doctor Bathurst and Doctor Moreno are no more. Of those who disembarked in this place, I, one of the oldest, remain almost alone. But death is overtaking me, in my turn. I feel it mounting from my cold feet to my

flagging heart.

When we first settled here, a few of us undertook to build some houses. The unfinished structures have fallen in ruins.

Our work is finished. I have entrusted the manuscripts containing our summary of human knowledge to an iron chest brought off the *Virginia*, which I have buried deep in the ground. Beside it, I shall bury these pages, rolled up and sealed in an aluminum tube.

Will anyone ever find the deposit committed to the earth? Will anyone ever care?

That is destiny's affair. God's will be done!

AS THE *Zartog* Sofr took in the sense of this fantastic document, an awful dismay gripped his heart.

Could it be true! Were the *Andarti-Iten-Schu* descended straight from those distant men who, after having wandered for long months over the empty seas, had chanced upon this point of the coast where now rose the towers of Basi-dra? And those miserable creatures were the fag-end of a proud human race, compared to which the present race was lisping as a child! And pon-

der this: what had been needed to abolish forever all the science of so mighty a people—and to erase even the memory of their existence? Less than nothing: simply an imperceptible shudder that ran through the crust of the globe.

Man had one time, long ago, pushed farther ahead on the road of truth than men had ever done since. It was all here in the record: things that Sofr already knew, and other things that he should not have dared imagine—such as the explanation of the name *Hedom*, over which there had been such high dispute! *Hedom* was a corruption of *Eddem*, itself a corruption of *Adam*, and Adam was possibly only a corruption of some other name still more ancient.

H E D O M, E D D E M,
ADAM: here was the perpetual symbol of the first man—but it stood likewise for mankind's successive reappearances on earth. Sofr had been wrong, then, to deny this ancestor, whose onetime existence was plainly attested by the document; and the unlearned folk had been right in claiming forbears as human as themselves. But here, too, as

in everything else, the *Andar-ti-Iten-Schu* had invented nothing. They had done no more than to repeat what had already been said.

But would a day ever come when the insatiable longing of man would be satisfied? Would a day ever come when, having won the crest of the slope, he could take his rest there, conqueror at last of the summit?

Thus mused the *Zartog* Sofr as he leaned over that venerable document.

A cool, gray dawn was approaching; but it was through this recital of a dawn long ago that he was contemplating the terrible drama perpetually unfolding in the universe, and his heart went out to the players.

Bloodied by the innumerable hardships suffered by those who had gone before him, bending under the weight of the useless labors piled up during the infinite stretch of time, the *Zartog* Sofr-Ai-Sr was slowly, reluctantly, convincing himself of the dreadful secret: that the Truth, when found, would prove to be the endless ordeal of regeneration.

THE END

VISITORS' BOOK



by JOHN BRUNNER

ARNOLD stood on the balcony of the operations room, not really taking in the master plot his eyes were fixed on. Below him, the watch personnel, earphones clasped on their heads, moved with long rods like a croupier's stick the

little symbols that showed the monstrous network of watchers girdling the sun. Every now and again there would be a minuscule error, and Arnold would pick up his mike and code out orders to the swinging ships to correct their course.

But nothing really happened.

He sighed, and went back to the desk he had first taken over three short weeks ago. Already, he felt tired of it and the monotony of the task, and he wished achingly that the clock on the wall would hurry towards the end of his watch.

As he settled behind the desk, a light glinted on the report panel, and he tripped the teleprinter switch beside it. Instantly, the busy keys rapped out a message.

XQKD — GBDV. 1167.

That was all. It was all there ever was from one of the robot orbital stations out beyond Pluto. Probably it was no more than a routine statement of mechanical efficiency. He yawned and reached for the black-bound Cypher Manual at his side.

A moment later he stood up and knocked the manual skittering across the floor. One or two of the men on duty below glanced up incuriously as he strode over to the edge of the balcony again and looked for the position of Robot Monitoring Station 1167. As soon as that was fixed in his mind he went out of the operations room at a run.

He was still running when he came to the door bearing the legend A. G. NWAKA, COLO-

NEL COMMANDING, and went in without knocking.

Nwaka raised his eyes from the file on his desk and was on the point of making a comment when he saw that Arnold was agitated. He demanded crisply, "Well?"

"1167 picked up an alien ship, sir," said Arnold breathlessly.

Instantly, Nwaka came from behind his desk. "Right. I want to take a look at this."

He studied the layout of the operations table for a long time before he made his decision. Pointing with a long brown finger, he said, "Who's that?"

Arnold followed his eye and saw the symbol of a manned patrol ship lying on the board within a few hours' flight of 1167. Hesitating only a moment, he said, "Galimov, sir."

"Good. Tell him to make course for the alien ship and report verbally on what he sees. Then notify Earth—use cryptest means. And then go down to the vault and open cabinet five. Inside you'll find a sealed book. Bring it to me in my office. Here's the key."

"Right, sir," said Arnold unhappily, and took the key.

INSIDE the alien ship a conference was in progress.

"Now the question is," said Harachmar, "what have we got?"

Chweit reached across him and opened contacts which notified all stations in the big ship that they were on duty and alert. He said, "That was just about right, where you put us, Harachmar."

"I still don't see why you wanted to break from hyper-drive twelve light hours from the star. I flatter myself we could have put you within ten minutes without any trouble."

"This system happens to be inhabited," said Chweit. "It's a strange custom of livable planets—they produce life. And this lot have space flight."

Harachmar considered the fact, nodding slowly. "What standard? Have they the faster-than-light drive?"

"We haven't found any sign of it yet. But we were picked up by a monitor as soon as we broke, and to judge from the number of detectable ships and stations in transit or orbit, this is a passably crowded traffic area."

"Trouble?"

"Well, one ship can attract plenty. If we'd materialized as close to the inhabited worlds as you wanted, we'd have had hydrogen mines knocking at our

screens and asking to be let in as soon as the local soldiery got over their surprise."

"Hydrogen mines we can handle, surely," said Harachmar.

"Yes, but not too many of them, or too large. And besides, they may have something else as well. We've got a good ship here—but it's on its own."

Harachmar reflected on the populated part of the ship—the quarter that wasn't drive machinery—and the thought of all that armament was comforting. He said, "Well, if they haven't got interstellar flight, they won't bother us."

"You sound as if you want us to go in and take the planet over," Chweit commented. "That's all very well if the race on it is savage, or doesn't exist. But our task in a case like this is to find out what it will take to conquer the locals—not to do it. I agree that if they're only at the sub-light stage of space travel, they shouldn't worry us, but we don't want to be left with an unusable radio-desert for our pains."

He pressed the *report* button. Observation was the first to come in.

"This is Brach, sir," said a soft voice. "Considerable activity on the electronic level. No

gravitic communication has been found. We haven't broken the language yet, since from the shortness of the messages all we are getting is pre-arranged code signals. I'd say they have trouble with their information transfer. But there's a pile reaction headed our way. The inhabitants are coming out to take a look at us.

"Let me know when you get a decent image to show me," said Chweit. "Armaments, what about you?"

"Ready and waiting sir," said a different voice. "State of equipment—serviceable. State of personnel—on watch and ready."

"Fine," said Chweit. "Cloust? What's the situation at Engines?"

"Drive cooling," was the answer. "Serviceability of engines—estimatly ninety per cent. We're changing a thrust pole on number six, but it shouldn't take more than an hour."

"Get it fixed fast," said Chweit sharply. "Who ordered you to immobilize the ship like that?"

"I did," said Harachmar.

"Well, anyway," Chweit backed down. "Get it fixed." He avoided Harachmar's annoyed gaze and began to check the inship stations—personnel,

administrative, medical, catering, discipline. All reports being favorable, he shut off the communicator and sat back with a sigh.

ARNOLD found himself nervously shredding a sheet of paper into fragments, and threw it aside in annoyance. Beside him, Colonel Nwaka looked up from the thick, red-bound volume bearing the title *Most Secret—Directive 957/09*, which Arnold had earlier brought from the secret documents vault. His chocolate-colored face broke into a grin.

"You look as if you were due to die at dawn," he said.

"It might be that way, sir," answered Arnold miserably.

At that moment a voice from the open communicator rang out, and they were all attention. The words had been scrambled in transit and there was a faint distortion, but they were comprehensible.

"Galimov here. Do you read me, Titan?"

Arnold passed the mike to Nwaka, who answered urgently, "Titan reading you. Nwaka here—what have you got?"

"It's alien all right. And it's enormous. I estimate it at a mass of not less than five hun-

dred thousand tons, and it's at least a mile long. It must have faster-than-light drive, or it would have shown on my detectors before 1167 caught it. It's covered in what look like long-range rocket launchers, and it's coming in fast. I can't extra-polate it's course back—"

There was the beginning of a rending crash, and then complete silence.

"What—?" began Arnold. Nwaka put the mike down.

"They blasted him," he said. "You'll see it on the table in a moment. You'd better get that through to Earth as fast as you can, but I think I know what their answer will be."

"But what the hell can we do against a race with faster-than-light drive?"

"Do as I say," said Mwaka. "You might be surprised."

"**B**RACH, sir," said Chweitz's speaker. "We're tracking this ship that's coming out to us. I'll put it on your screen."

While they waited for the image to stabilize, Chweitz mused, "I wonder if we'd be silly enough to walk into the lion's jaws to count his teeth?"

"Maybe they never met a lion before," said Harachmar.

"To judge from the thoroughness with which they monitor

their perimeter, either they've met people from outside before, or they have over-developed and jumpy imaginations. In either case, our course is definitely one of care—for now, at any rate."

"Here it is, sir," said the speaker again. "It's tiny—a mere six or eight hundred tons. It must have been in orbit when we got here—it couldn't have reached us from a planetary body in this space of time."

"That's certainly not a menace," observed Harachmar as he contemplated the miniature image of a rocket under full power that filled the screen before them.

"You're jumping to conclusions," said Chweitz thoughtfully. "There's no reason why that shouldn't be able to come up to this ship, drift through our screens as if they didn't exist, and spread us across a rapidly expanding volume of space."

Harachmar looked at him sharply. "You're joking," he said, but he sounded uncomfortable.

"Of course," agreed Chweitz. "I doubt if that ship could go through a planetary atmosphere, let alone our screens. It's a primitive canoe. But you felt bad at the idea, didn't you?"

"Naturally."

"I think in some ways it's a judgment on us that we should be perpetually afraid," Chweit went on. "How many planets have we dispossessed?"

"Over a hundred."

"I thought it was less. Still, that brings out my point. We've done it to so many people that we're forever afraid of it happening to us."

Harachmar turned in his seat and gazed at the other with blank amazement. He said fiercely, "Chweit, do you realize what you're saying?"

"I have nightmares," said Chweit calmly. "Nightmares in which this ship is followed home from one or another of the systems that we visit by a fleet of faster-than-light ships carrying weapons against which we have no defence and armor which we cannot pierce."

"It'll never happen," asserted Harachmar, but there was little conviction in his voice.

"It has never happened," Chweit corrected him. "It may—the odds are all in favor."

"Rubbish," Harachmar all but shouted. "If that's the way you feel, we might as well give up and go straight home."

"Oh, no. Not while there's an inhabited planet here. I want to see that world taken

and made one of ours. Not so much because we need it, but because that would be one less place for the threat to come from. We're walking a tight-rope over a sea of flame, and we shall never feel secure until we've conquered every system in the galaxy. Then, maybe we'll be able to relax."

"But inter-galactic travel—" said Harachmar, in spite of himself.

Chweit laughed, a little sadly. "You see?" he said. "We've chosen our way, and now we are embarked upon it there is no turning back."

He looked again at the tiny image on the view screen. "What's it got, Brind?" he went on, keying open the line to Armaments.

"Radioactive weapons, sir," was the reply. "That's all. No energy source big enough to load a beam. It's not a match for us—we could go through its meteor screens as if they were paper."

"Blast it," ordered Chweit.

There was a hiss of indrawn breath from the speaker. "Would you repeat that, sir?" Brind asked hesitantly.

"I said blast it. Knock it out of space. Use the smallest and least efficient weapon we have

capable of doing the job. If I want to study the behavior of ants, I stir the heap with a stick. This will tell us what they have to fight with and if it offers any obstacles to us."

"Right, sir," said Brind, but it was plain that he was unhappy about it.

"You see?" Chweit commented a little grimly. "Brind is as afraid of some impersonal vengeance as you or I."

Harachmar said nothing, but kept his eyes on the screen.

It was minutes only before the ship in it abruptly turned into a cloud of boiling gases and dissipated its mass among the interstellar dust.

"Brach here, sir," the speaker muttered after a while. "The ship Armaments just blasted—it was broadcasting, presumably to a home base somewhere not far from here. Also there is considerable noise from the robot station that reported our arrival. It seems to be some kind of alarm."

"Brind! Blast the robot station as well. Make them really unhappy while we're about it. There's a chance that if they don't like the way we get rid of their best stuff, they may be too frightened to offer resistance."

A pause. Then, "Robot destroyed, sir," Brind said. He sounded very nearly frightened.

"Assessment from Armaments," a new voice cut in, much more assured than Brind's. "No resistance was offered to the light weapon employed. No screens were detected except a minimum of meteor protection. Analysis of the resultant explosion shows no energy source except a space drive pile operating on a simple reaction principle and the suspected detonation of an atomic missile. Enemy weapons assessed as primitive."

Chweit noted the defense mechanism implicit in the use of the word *enemy*, and smiled faintly.

"Right," he said. "Now we await results."

FOR PERHAPS the twentieth time Arnold stood up and went across the balcony to look down at the operations table. In his hand was the last thing to come from the 'printer on the desk behind him. It was the final message from 1167, the monitor which had first found the alien, and consisted of two simple code groups as always. These, though, meant:

"Alien known to be hostile. Station under attack."

But now there was a piece missing from the jigsaw on the table below, and an uncomfortable gap in the ring of watchers. There was a new symbol in the gap, too—one he had never expected to see. There was a brilliant red question mark which signified *ALIEN*.

He could almost smell the sense of uneasiness which arose from the busy men below him. There were no words, but the glances they kept passing meaningfully every time their eyes fell on that red query made their anxiety plain enough.

The door opened, and he turned to see that this had infected even the normally imperturbable Nwaka. His dark, strong face was lined and haggard.

"Anything from Earth?" he demanded abruptly.

"Nothing yet, sir," said Arnold worriedly. "Unless—" He stepped back to the desk, and as if the transmitter far away had anticipated his arrival, the light on the panel began to blink. He tripped the switch, and read the message eagerly as it emerged from the 'printer.

From: Minister for War.

To: All units holding Directive 957/08, as amended.

Most secret—encode by cryptest means.

Priority—instantaneous immediate.

I. Proceed in accordance with directive above-named.

*FOR THE PRESIDENT OF EARTH,
Li Liang-Huen.*

Nwaka had come up behind him and was reading it over his shoulder. He said without glancing up, "High time." He seemed satisfied.

"What does that mean?" Arnold demanded. "I never heard of—oh! That book I fetched out of the operations table," he said. "I think I could do with some sleep. Isn't it about time Rattray came on?"

Startled, Arnold looked at the wall-clock. It was more than an hour past the termination of his watch. He said, "Of course, sir. I'll go and wake him—I promised to call him two hours ago. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him not to be surprised at the number of symbols he has to use this watch," answered Nwaka cryptically, and went out.

THE RESULTS were a long time coming. And when they

did arrive, they were not what had been expected.

Chweit was almost out of patience, and ready to order another show of force, when Brach's voice from Observation heralded the long-awaited answer. He said, "Sir, there's a ship coming. A big one."

"Put it on the screen," said Chweit.

Shortly, the image of a ship so big that at the standard magnification for its distance it filled the screen from edge to edge, appeared before them.

Harachmar sat forward on his chair as if jolted by an electric shock.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"That," said Chweit, choosing his words with care, "is the biggest ship either of us has ever seen in space."

"Sir—" there was a note of alarm in Brach's voice, "—our radar doesn't register this thing properly. It won't hold the image. We can't get a distance-fix on it, and the mass-register won't stop still!"

Slowly whitening, Harachmar sat back again. Chweit rapped out, "Find out why! Armaments, get every gun and beam we have focused on that ship. Stand by to blast!"

"What if we can't hurt it?"

said Harachmar. His forehead was beaded with sweat.

"That's exactly the point," said Chweit. "We aren't up against a primitive rocket this time. We daren't fire, for fear of not achieving anything."

They sat in silence for a while, as the ship loomed larger and larger. They had to step down the magnification twice to keep it in sight.

"This is it," Harachmar kept whispering. "This is it." He wished he was a peasant with a god to whom to pray.

But nothing happened. No bolts of intolerable lightning flashed out to exact a revenge for the loss of the other ship and the orbital station, and at length Brach voiced what they were slowly coming to suspect.

"Sir, that's a dead ship! She isn't under drive—she's drifting!"

And indeed it was true. The mighty stern tubes, that looked capable of lowering the ship's vast bulk to the surface of a sun with less force than would crack an eggshell, were cold and quiet. The ship was on a derelict's course.

"Where's she from?" Chweit demanded.

"She must have been lying inert in orbit somewhere. We

didn't notice her before a few minutes ago. It looks as if she blasted off and something went wrong." A note of cautious jubilation crept into his voice. "Maybe their big bang was a misfire."

"No!" said Chweitz decisively. "There must be a reason for this. A people who could build a ship like that wouldn't design it so that it went wrong the very first time it was used."

"The first time?" said Harachmar involuntarily.

"You don't fight interplanetary wars with battlewagons like that," said Chweitz. "You'd lose half your planets. No, that must be their major defensive weapon. A ship packed as full as possible with everything technology can devise for the inevitable attack from outside their system."

"Why do you say it is their major defensive weapon?" Harachmar wondered. "Would they send out their only one—like this? Dead? I don't think so. It would come out fighting. They must have more than one."

"Sir," said Cloust from engines, "do you want the drive warmed?"

"Warm it," said Harachmar. "We'll probably need to get out

of here in a hurry."

"No!" said Chweitz decisively. "We won't be going. We stay here—until something happens."

"Are you out of your mind?" said Harachmar incredulously. "You mean we're going to stay here right under the nose of that thing? Don't be more stupid than you can help."

"Remember what I said about an alien following us home?" Chweitz answered quietly. "The drive stays cold."

Harachmar remained silent, but his face went grey.

IT WAS like a game of chess, thought Arnold. Unfortunately, there was no time limit on the moves. It was more than three days since the new piece—this time, the symbol was a black cross—had moved out of nowhere and begun its leisurely drift towards the red query. In that time, he had found himself almost incapable of sleep, and had taken to spending his time in the operations room "in case he was needed."

Nwaka too was spending much of his spare hours here, and the contrast between them grew minutely more pronounced. With the enigmatic message from Earth, his worry

seemed to have sloughed at least partly off him. It isn't fair, Arnold thought dispiritedly. He knows what's going on.

Below, the man in charge of that sector moved the black cross one step further on its journey.

FOR THE ten-thousandth time Chweit raised red-rimmed eyes from the view-screen, which still held that same awe-inspiring image, and repeated, "There's got to be a reason for this!"

Harachmer leapt out of his seat and began to pace the length of the cabin. After a couple of circuits, he wheeled suddenly and asked, "Must there be a reason? Why can't you accept that it's within the bounds of possibility the enemy ship should have gone wrong—is simply lying there, drifting? Why not let's settle that once and for all? If it's booby-trapped, there's no need to go close to it to find out. Just send a life-boat, manned by a crew of volunteers, to draw its teeth. Or at least to find out if it has any."

Chweit nodded reluctantly. "That's right," he admitted. "We don't have to endanger the ship—we might even get

something out of it we can use ourselves. Attention!"

He snapped open the general address circuits.

"Attention! Since the enemy ship has lain dormant for so long, it has been decided that it cannot intend to attack. There is a high probability that it has failed and is incapable of so doing. Volunteers are called for, one from each of the following sections: Armaments, Observation, Navigation, Engines. These men will have the task of investigating the alien ship.

"The alien ship is to be considered a derelict."

It took some time, but after a while the names of volunteers began to trickle in, and Chweit picked those whom he knew to be most stable and competent. Nonetheless, it was with misgivings so great as to approach terror that he watched the image of the little life-boat leave their ship and cautiously move on to a collision course with the alien. They all waited, in the ship, for the life-boat to vanish—or flare into nothing—or turn into a manned bomb and attack its own ship.

Nothing of the sort happened.

Instead, the small and the

big spacecraft converged, and the first hesitant report to come in was full of jubilation. The voice was that of Brind, from Armaments, the senior member of the four-man crew.

"The locks are open to space," he reported baldly.

Harachmar turned to Chweit, starting to say, "What did I tell you?" but Chweit motioned him to silence. His teeth had closed so firmly on his lower lip that the blood had begun to flow.

The boat touched. One man in a spacesuit entered the vast lock of the alien, and disappeared. Brind's voice announced that radio contact had been lost, owing to the intervention of the hull and a peculiar sourceless static which the listeners could hear crackling in their own speakers. An hour elapsed. Another, and a second man followed the first. It must have been Brind, for a different voice made the third report—a non-committal statement of absence of progress.

In all, more than six hours had elapsed before the two men returned from searching that colossal hulk. Even before the official announcement, there was something in their

very movements which indicated success, and indeed the word came shortly after.

"Captain Chweit! The ship is empty!"

Slowly, Chweit and Harachmar relaxed. Chweit felt for a handkerchief, becoming conscious of his bitten lip for the first time, and said thickly, "Congratulations: Right, leave it. I want all the members of the search party to report to me right away. In person."

Harachmar, this time, could not be stopped from saying, "I told you so."

Even so, it was a worried captain who acknowledged the salutes of the reconnoitring party when they entered the cabin on their return. He said immediately, "Well? What's it got?"

The four men looked hesitantly at one another. It was Brind who finally had the courage to break the silence. He said, "Everything, sir."

"What do you mean? Explain."

"Just that, sir. There's hardly anything there which we could understand. I managed to get a look at the armament while I was on board, and though that's my job I never saw anything like it. As far as

I can see, they pipe some kind of energy—fusion, at a guess—into a beam. At least, there are some blackened cradles which lead off to output antennae. That's the only thing I could even remotely guess at. The controls are fantastic. It looks as if five or six hundred men would be needed to run the ship—and there's absolutely nobody on board."

"As far as the engines go, sir," one of the other three chipped in, "they work on no principle I ever heard of. It looks as if they use raw energy. And I mean raw. It could even be neutrino stuff. They draw it off into some kind of metal frame running around the hull. It's probably faster-than-light drive of a kind we don't know about."

"I see," said Chweit. "And you're sure there's nobody on board?"

"Certain, sir. There just isn't anywhere for them to *be*."

"Then we are going to find out what makes that ship tick. And when we've done that, we'll know exactly what we're up against. Harachmar, would you organize the necessary teams? This is the best break we've ever had."

THE RED question mark and the black cross had finally come so close that the scale on the board was too small to show the gap between them. Arnold gazed at them with tired eyes, wondering what was supposed to happen now.

A manned patrol ship, watching from the absolute limit of detector range with positively the best radar ever taken into space from Earth, reported that something had left the alien and touched with the mystery ship represented by the black cross. Arnold notified Nwaka when the latter came in.

For some reason, it seemed to make him overjoyed. He took from his pocket a signal form on which a message was already written, and said, "Send that to Earth. Right away."

In astonishment, Arnold took it and read it. He was no better off when he had done so, for it ran, simply:

Dog has seen rabbit.

IT WASN'T quite the break he had thought it was.

They put in a complete team of technicians, all very highly skilled tradesmen, for their fighting service had access to all the latest technical and scientific knowledge. And

conversations ensued...

"What are you so worried about, Grad?"

"It's this thing here."

"What about it? It's a guided missile, isn't it? In fact, it's about the only recognizable thing we've dug out of this department."

"Yes, it's a guided missile, all right, with an ordinary fusion warhead. But it's got nothing to guide it! This circuit is set up as if the informations loss was nil. Chief, that's impossible!"

And again:

"Well, it's plain that you pipe the heavy¹ hydrogen in here and initiate a fusion reaction in it with the pocket-size atom bombs they store in these lockers over here. The power is somehow drained off into this tube here and fed into a square frame aerial about six feet long somewhere the other side of that hull. That much is clear. But how the hell can you have a dozen hydrogen bombs going off in little metal cups right in the middle of your ship?"

"It must have something to do with this doolally here."

"Yes, that's what I think. It's focused right slap in the middle of the cup. But we've

tried putting power into it, and all it does is create a magnetic field. And nobody is going to tell me we dare try this thing out before we find how a magnetic field can control a fusion reaction."

And again:

"Well, we know exactly what this is. It's the Nurald effect. We discovered it fifty or sixty years ago, and we never found a practical use for it. But these people seem to be able to make it do tricks—though what kind of tricks is strictly beyond me."

"It doesn't make sense."

THAT WAS exactly it. It didn't make sense.

They solved the problem of why they had so much trouble with the radar. In addition to—warping space, they decided to call it—the silver and copper frame around the hull shifted all radiation falling on it half an octave down the spectrum. That was aside from the fact that the whole skin was space-black and absorbed light in the visible range as if it hadn't been there. Chweit sat and marveled for an hour at that, asking why his own people had never thought of it.

They solved the problem of

the mass-register. It had something to do with a meaningless alloy of rare minerals in a steel ball machined to an incredible tolerance which hung judiciously balanced between giant alnico magnets at the exact center of gravity of the ship. But they couldn't see the point of it.

It was on the twentieth day that Observation reported, "Sir, we're being watched."

"Who by?"

"There are about four hundred enemy ships of all sizes ringed in a semi-circle at the limit of detector range. Two or three of them are ships as big as the one they sent before."

"Are they doing anything?"

"No, sir. They're just—waiting for us to go away."

Chweit sat bolt upright. For a moment he was speechless. Harachmar demanded, "Are you all right?"

"Yes," said Chweit with difficulty. "Yes, I'm all right. And so, by the grace of a very kind and wise people, are all of us."

Harachmar looked as if he suspected insanity, but Chweit went on, the words tumbling from his mouth. "Don't you see? Here, we've run up against what we've always feared—a science which we

can't understand, which is so superior to ours that we couldn't last against it for a moment. We came here, and the first thing we did was to destroy one of their ships—probably a sort of one-man go-cart. But instead of retaliating, as we expected them to do, they must have looked us over and discovered how primitive we are. So, rather than attack us and wipe us out, they simply sent us a sample of what was waiting for us. We've looked at it and we know we're beaten. Now they're waiting for us to admit it."

"But surely they wouldn't have sent us their best weapons? Supposing we'd turned them back on them?"

"They won't have sent us anything they haven't got a defense for. But the fact remains, we can't understand them. Why, those crazy atomic fusion beams of theirs could go through our screens and we'd never know any more. No, Harachmar, let's go. Let's get out before they run out of patience, and we suffer that long-ago vengeance we're all so afraid of."

THERE was a sudden ripple of excitement in the opera-

tions room, and, unbelievably, the man in charge of the sector where the visitor was located reached out his croupier's stick and moved the red question mark—away from the sun.

Arnold caught the motion and whirled on Nwaka. "Look at that!" he exploded. "What in God's name did we *do*, sir?"

He picked up the thick volume labelled *Directive 957/08* and weighed it meditatively in his hand. He said, "Well, I can tell you now, I suppose. It'll be released to the public soon enough.

"We just pulled the biggest bluff in the history of man. This book started out as a minute from the Minister for War back in '08. Came up at a cabinet meeting. They'd decided that we couldn't expect to dodge interstellar contact much longer, once we were in space ourselves, so the psychologists set up a kind of defense.

"So they built about a dozen ships—bigger than anything else we'd ever dreamed of. Ten, even fifteen miles long. Then they turned loose the backroom boys to dream up the wildest inventions they could, things that looked as if they did the impossible. Those ships *look* as if they go faster than light, and they're stuffed chock-full of every inexplicable scientific effect that has ever been discovered.

He put the volume down on the desk and gazed at it. "You'll get to read this some time," he said. "Now that it's been proved to work, they may even declassify it. It's fascinating, really."

He glanced up at Arnold with a faint smile, the first in many days.

"We call it the Visitors' Book," he said.

THE END



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